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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **HUGH PENTECOST**

TITLE: ***An End to Fear***

TYPE: Human Interest Detective Story

LOCALE: Bridgewater, United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *A high-tension, fast-action novelette that you can read, if you wish, as a two-part serial. The end of Part One is the space break on page 13—but if you can stop there, you've got more will power than we had!*

KATHY'S FACE HAD GONE DEAD-white as she turned and held out the telephone to him.

"A person to person call for you from Bridgewater," she said.

Jim Hammond put down his pipe and book as casually as he could and got up from his chair. No matter how much time passed, the fear never left Kathy. Even the mention of the town would throw her into a state of panic. Jim tried to conceal the butterflies in his own stomach. He put his arm around Kathy and gave her a gentle hug before he took the phone.

"Only one person in Bridgewater knows where to find me, darling."

Kathy's voice trembled. "And some day, when she's drunk—"

"Not as long as she keeps getting that monthly check," Jim said. "You can count on that." He turned to the phone. "James Hammond speaking."

Kathy walked over and sat down on the edge of the sofa, her hands locked so tightly they were marble-white.

"We have Mr. Hammond on the phone," the operator's voice said.

"Jim?" It was Lisa, and the voice still scraped at his nerves like a saw-toothed knife.

"What is it, Lisa?"

"How are you, lover?" Lisa sounded slightly tipsy.

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"Very well, thank you."

"I got problems, Jimmy."

"You should have your check by now. It was mailed on the first as usual."

"Oh, I got the check, all right, Jimmy." Lisa laughed. "Regular as clockwork, aren't you, Jimmy? It isn't money. It's David."

Jim felt his pulse beat quicken. "What's wrong with him? Is he ill?"

"I'll say!" He heard the old familiar edge of complaint. "Sick in the head. For sixteen years I've tried, Jimmy. I've given that kid everything he could possibly want. Now what do you think?"

"Please tell me what the trouble is, Lisa."

"Caught stealing!" Her voice rose. "Caught stealing and hauled into Juvenile Court. He had no record, so they let him off on probation, provided he'd take a job after school hours. My son, stealing! Working as a soda jerk in Wolfram's Drug Store!"

"Why have you called me?" Jim asked, quietly.

"Because I've had it!" Lisa said. Her voice slurred. "He's not normal. No sports. No friends. No nothing. Now he's just a common thief. I'm throwing in the towel."

"That still doesn't explain why you've called me."

"He's your son, too, isn't he?" Lisa shouted. "You haven't lifted a finger to do anything for him for sixteen years. You—"

"I've supported him—and you," Jim said.

"Sure—because the judge said so. I'm telling you, I've had it. If you want to take charge he's all yours."

Jim hesitated, the palms of his hands moist. "Why don't you send him out here—for a visit, Lisa. If I could spend a little time with him, perhaps—"

"Are you kidding?" The tipsy laughter again. "Wild horses couldn't get him out there. He hates your guts, Jim. Well, it's your baby now. So long."

"Lisa! Lisa—what did he steal?"

The line was dead.

If Kathy had relaxed it wasn't noticeable. Jim put down the phone and walked over to the table beside his chair. He picked up his pipe and tinkered with it a moment to get it going. Kathy waited for him to tell her what it was all about. That was Kathy—no questions. She'd let him tell it his own way. He sat down on the arm of the sofa beside her.

"David's in trouble," he said, and told her what Lisa had said on the phone.

"But what can you do about it?" Kathy asked.

Jim was silent for a long time. "I can go to him."

"No!" Kathy's eyes were wide with fright.

"He's my son, Kathy, and I owe him a sixteen-year debt of neglect."

"You haven't neglected him!" Kathy protested. "You've supported him, educated him. It isn't your fault

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the judge gave Lisa custody of the child."

"They give custody of a six-month-old infant to the mother, even if she has three heads," Jim said. "I could have gone to see him."

"You couldn't go back to Bridgewater!" Kathy said. "You can't go back now."

"He's in trouble," Jim said.

"Jim! You're not seriously thinking of going?"

"Why not? He's my own flesh and blood."

"I'm your wife. Jim, darling, please, please be sensible. If you go back to Bridgewater—"

"He won't come here," Jim said. "Quite naturally he hates me."

"Then you can't do anything for him."

"I can try," Jim said.

There was another long silence and then Kathy said, very quietly: "You've made up your mind."

"I think I have to go, Kathy."

"Bridgewater's a small place," Kathy said. Her voice had lost all color. "Somebody will recognize you the first hour you're there. Zabala will know ten minutes later. That will mean the end of us—the end of our life together, the end of everything."

He tried a small, reassuring laugh. "It's a hundred to one that anyone will recognize me. And if they do—well, I still have a permit to carry a gun. David needs help, Kathy."

"All right," Kathy said. "Let's pack our things."

"Whoa," Jim said, gently. He took her in his arms and held her very close. He loved her desperately at that moment. "Not *our* things, baby. Just mine."

"I'm going with you. If there's danger—"

"If there *is* danger, Kathy, you'd make it twice as great. If it became a question of trying to slip away quickly and we were separated—Believe me, darling, if I'm alone and move cautiously—"

He felt her go limp in his arms. She had accepted defeat. "Oh, Jim, Jim!" She was trying hard not to cry.

The train clicked its way toward Bridgewater. Jim sat looking out the window, not seeing the rolling farm country that slipped by. His mind had gone a long way back in time—just over sixteen years. He was just twenty then, a precocious college graduate. There was Lisa, just his age, singing at a roadhouse outside of Bridgewater, an eminently respectable place. She had a small, warm, limpid voice, not unlike the late Helen Morgan's. She was gay and lively and full of dreams. One night they drove over the State line and were married by a Justice of the Peace. Jim had to lie about his age because he wasn't yet twenty-one. Almost at once they knew there was going to be a child. Jim got a job on a local newspaper, and Lisa kept on working for another three or four months. It was an idyllic time.

After Lisa had to stop working, a

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few small clouds appeared on the horizon. She grew irritable and he discovered her penchant for solitary drinking in spite of doctor's orders. Jim supposed this might be the result of normal panics in a first pregnancy, and he managed to stay cheerful in spite of her increasing outbursts of temper. He was very much in love. Then, just about three weeks after David was born, Lisa went back to work. It was the end of everything. Their working hours didn't coincide. She went out on dates with other men. Her drinking grew worse. Then came a colossal blowup and she asked for her freedom. Jim, horrified by the change in her, agreed. He had, he realized, no particular feeling for the child. In a way, the child was one of the causes of the breakup.

David was six months old when they separated, and Jim had not seen him since that day. Jim went on working in Bridgewater on the *Post*. It was three years after the divorce that he got onto the story of Tony Zabala. Zabala was a relic of the bootleg era—a mobster and racketeer. A little fruit store where Jim did business was blown up, presumably because the owner had refused to pay Zabala protection money. Jim investigated. A few months later he had unearthed enough evidence against Tony Zabala to send him to the chair. He was the prosecution's chief witness at the trial. Zabala burned.

The day after the execution Jim came face to face on Main Street with Mike Zabala, Tony's son. Mike was dark, intense, his nerves stretched to the breaking point. Jim had never forgotten the sound of his shaking voice.

"The Bible says 'an eye for an eye,' Hammond. That's the way it's going to be. Maybe not today. Maybe not tomorrow. They'd come after me quick. But when things have cooled down, you're going to pay for what you did to my father. I don't care how long I have to wait."

Jim went to the police and asked for protection. He had never forgotten the tired, prematurely lined face of Lieutenant Magee either.

"Sure, we can give you protection for a while, Jim," Magee said. "But it can't go on forever. Maybe I flatter myself, but I think I'm something of a psychologist. Mike Zabala's blood is hot, but he's got patience—loads of it. Sooner or later—" Magee shrugged.

"So I just sit around and wait to be knocked off?" Jim asked.

Magee looked at him thoughtfully. "You're twenty-three years old, Jim. There's the whole world for you to work in. Mike Zabala's world is bounded by the city limits of Bridgewater. You can start over anywhere. Zabala's got to stay here and run the machine his father left him. If you play the hero, he'll get you sooner or later. If you play it sensible and go a long way away from here—a long way—chances are you'll live to be a great-grandfather."

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"You're asking me to run away?"

"I'm giving you good advice. Mike Zabala won't live forever. They don't in his racket. When he's cashed in his chips, if you still think Bridgewater's such a fascinating place to live in, you can come back."

For a couple of weeks Jim played it the hard way. He got a permit to carry a gun. He insisted on police protection, and Magee, with a sad shake of his head, supplied. Nothing happened except that there wasn't a single waking or sleeping hour that Jim was free of fear. Finally he went to his managing editor and talked to him about it. He found the old newspaperman in agreement with Magee.

"You're young enough to start over anywhere you like without this hanging over your head, son."

Jim was given a letter to the owner of a small-town weekly several hundred miles away. One day he went, without a word to anyone. When the first of the month came he didn't have the money to send to Lisa, but he had made arrangements to borrow what he needed in a few days. He called her long distance to tell her the money would be coming. Lisa was drunk, and there was a sadistic quality to her laughter.

"I had a visitor last night, Jimmy. Guess who?"

"I couldn't guess."

"Mike Zabala." She laughed again. "He said he knew you'd be in touch with me some time. He said to tell you he knew you'd left town. He said to tell you some day he'd catch up with you. He said he wasn't in a hurry, but the next time he saw you —"

A long time ago. In between that day and this much had happened. There had been a first novel which was unbelievably successful. There had been a second, and then a fabulous movie sale. There had been Kathy—sweet, warm, understanding Kathy. There had been peace and security and love and work. And now he was on his way back to Bridgewater where a boy whom he hadn't seen in sixteen years had turned thief. Back to Bridgewater, where a patient Mike Zabala waited . . .

The Mansion House Hotel was on Bridgewater's Main Street, directly across from Wolfram's Drug Store. Driving from the railroad station to the hotel in a cab, Jim felt tensions he hadn't known for more than ten years. That long ago he had begun to forget about Mike Zabala. It was apparent that Mike wasn't going to come after him. As long he stayed away from the Bridgewater area Jim was apparently safe. Of course there had been oddities brought about by the old fear. He had written his books under a pen name. He had never given out any publicity about "Dale Mason," the author, that would link him with the Jim Hammond who had once sent Tony Zabala to the chair. He was safe. That is, he had been safe—until now.

Bridgewater had changed. With

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the growth of wartime manufacturing, it had grown from a small town of ten thousand people into a small city four times that size. But the central district of the town had not changed too much. It looked the same—a few more big signs, a new bank building on the corner next to the Mansion House, the trolley tracks ripped up and the cobblestones replaced by concrete. The Mansion House itself was newly painted, newly decorated, and there were strange faces at the desk.

Jim signed the register *J. R. Hammond* before he realized that this might be his first mistake. All the way in the cab he had stared out the window, searching for a familiar face belonging to one of the hoodlums connected with the old Zabala mob. He had seen no one he knew. He had told no one he was coming, not even Lisa. She might suspect how he would react to her call, but she couldn't be sure. There was no reason that anyone should be looking for him. It was foolish to let the old panics rise up in his throat.

In his room Jim unpacked his bag and changed into a gray tropical worsted suit. It was a hot afternoon. He had taken the .45 automatic out of his bag and laid it on the bureau. Now, when he slipped it into the pocket of the light-weight suit, it bulged absurdly. It was typical soap opera, he told himself. After all these years Mike Zabala had probably forgotten he even existed. He hesitated, then dropped the gun in the top drawer of his bureau. He went to the phone and called Kathy back home.

"Everything's as peaceful as a Sunday School convention," he told her. "Don't worry, darling."

"I've been thinking you should call your friend Lieutenant Magee," Kathy said. "If he knows you're in town he could protect you for a day or two."

"If there's the slightest sign of any trouble I promise I will, angel. Right now, the less attention I call to myself the safer it will be."

"Bring David back with you if you can, Jim."

"I love you," he said.

As Jim walked out onto the sidewalk and stared across the street at the gadget-filled window of Wolfram's Drug Store, he suddenly laughed. The feeling of panic was stronger, but in that moment he knew it had nothing to do with Zabala. He was about to confront a son he had never really known—a sixteen-year-old boy who was his own flesh and blood and yet was a complete stranger to him. His hands trembled as he filled his pipe and lit it. He intended to make a casual entrance. He wanted to see the boy, size him up, before he identified himself.

Wolfram's was cool and not too brightly lit. As Jim walked in, puffing at his pipe, he saw that he was the only customer. At the back of the store a gray-coated pharmacist

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was busy filling a prescription. The soda fountain was to his right, and behind it a boy in a white jacket was washing glasses. Jim's heart pounded against his ribs. He had wondered if he could be certain, but now that he saw the boy he realized he would have known him anywhere. The high forehead, the gently wavy brown hair, the sensitive, slightly petulant mouth were Lisa's; the wide-set gray eyes were unmistakably Jim's.

Jim sat down on one of the tall stools and put his pipe on the counter. The boy came over to him.

"Yes, sir?"

"I'll have a—a coke," Jim said. Damn that unsteady voice.

"Yes, sir." David went to prepare the drink.

"Hot this afternoon," Jim said.

"Yes, sir." The boy brought the coke and put it in front of Jim.

"I suppose you just work here after school?"

"Yes, sir."

"You in high school?"

"Yes, sir." The boy's gray eyes stared steadily at Jim.

"Junior? Senior?"

The boy drew a deep breath. "Just what is it you want of me, father?"

Jim's smile froze and he realized there were beads of perspiration on his forehead. "How did you know me, David?"

"There was a picture—one mother forgot—in the attic. If you'll excuse me now, I have work to do."

"David!"

The boy hesitated. "Yes, sir?"

"Don't you think it's about time we got to know each other?"

"Why?" The gray eyes were openly hostile.

"I came here especially to see you, David. I know you're in trouble and I'd like to help."

"You've never wanted to help me before," David said. "Why should you want to help now?"

The little bell rang over the entrance door, announcing the arrival of another customer. In the mirror Jim saw a young man in sports jacket and slacks go over to the magazine rack and start to thumb through a magazine.

"Whether you want the help or not," he said, "I'd like the chance to explain to you why you and I have been separated for so long."

"It doesn't matter," David said.

"It matters to me," Jim said, urgently. "You have a right to make your own judgments, David, but not without knowing both sides of the case."

"I'm very grateful for the money you've always sent," David said, stiffly.

Jim forced a smile. "Aren't you even curious? If you think I'm a louse, aren't you curious to know just how much of a louse?" He saw the boy's mouth twitch as though he wanted to smile, and Jim pushed the advantage. "We could have a bite to eat together and satisfy our mutual curiosity."

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David glanced at the clock over the door. "I'm off in about five minutes," he said.

Jim heaved a deep sigh of relief and reached for the coke. David busied himself with the unwashed glasses. The man in the sports jacket continued to examine the stock of magazines. When the glasses were washed David went to the back of the store and spoke to the pharmacist. When he joined Jim, the white coat had been exchanged for a conservative tweed jacket.

They walked across to the Mansion House and took a corner table in the grill room. They ordered. Then Jim began to talk. Without throwing any blame on Lisa he told the boy that they had been incompatible. When the court granted the divorce and awarded Lisa the custody of the child, Jim had felt he should stay out of the picture. It was no good for a growing boy to have two people tugging at him in different directions. Jim had believed that when the time came—when David was older—he would want to know his father and then their relationship could really begin. Jim explained how the Zabala case had forced him to leave Bridgewater. He had done his best in the hard times to provide for David and his mother, and when times had grown prosperous he had been generous in proportion. He had hoped David would make the first move. Now that David was in trouble Jim felt he couldn't wait any longer. He had to come to David and offer his help, as a friend, since he couldn't claim to be a real father.

The boy had no comment when Jim was finished. The waiter had brought food, but neither father nor son noticed it.

"Can you tell me about your trouble, David?" Jim asked, gently.

"I stole," the boy said, his eyes averted.

"What did you steal?"

"A book," the boy said.

Jim stared at him, astonished. "A book? But surely, with your allowance, you could afford to buy any book you wanted."

"Not this book," David said. "It was—it was in a sort of second-hand shop. They wouldn't have sold it to me."

"Why not?"

"The judge in the juvenile court said it was pornog—pornog—"

"Pornography?"

David nodded.

"What was it, David?"

The boy kept his eyes turned away. "It was called *Famous Courtesans of World History,*" he said. "By some—some French writer."

"Why did you want it—enough to steal it?" Jim asked.

"I—I just wanted it," David said.

Jim felt the muscles of his throat tighten until they ached intolerably. Suddenly he understood. Lisa, the only person the boy had to love, coming home night after night with her dates, or perhaps having a permanent affair under the same roof

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with this boy; David trying to justify it, to see it in some other light than personal rejection, stealing a book he hoped might glorify the thing he didn't understand.

Jim's eyes felt hot, as though tears might be close, and he looked away—and straight into the intently staring eyes of the man who had been reading the magazines at Wolfram's. He was seated at a table directly across the way. He ducked his head behind an evening paper as Jim's eyes met his. As certainly as if the man had worn a neon sign across his chest Jim knew. This one was from Zabala!

Jim spoke matter-of-factly. "You're not hungry?"

"No, sir."

"Neither am I. Listen, David, for reasons I'll explain when we get outside I think we should leave now. As we go out, take a look at the man sitting across from us, without making a special point of it, and tell me if you've ever seen him before."

He put down money for the check and they rose to leave. Out of the corner of his eye Jim saw agitation on the part of the watcher. He was beckoning frantically to his waiter. On the sidewalk David said:

"He was in Wolfram's a little while ago, sir, but I never saw him before that."

Jim hailed a taxi and they got in quickly. Jim gave Lisa's address. "I think he's one of Zabala's men, David. I want to get you home and out of this." He looked through the rear window of the cab. The man in the sports jacket was beckoning frantically to another cab. No doubt now. Jim's hand closed around David's wrist. "Look, David, if something should happen that makes it impossible for me to help you—if I can't do what I want to do for you—try to understand that it isn't because I don't love you. You know where I live?"

"Yes, sir."

"Kathy, my wife—" His voice was suddenly unsteady. "Kathy will help you."

The boy looked at him, eyes wide. "They're going to try to—to kill you, Jim?"

"Thanks for that, David—the 'Jim' instead of the 'sir'."

Through the back window the headlights of the second cab kept steadily behind them.

"When we get to Lisa's house," Jim said, "I'm going to have the driver slow down but not stop. I want you to jump and run for it, David."

"But Jim—!"

"He may try to pull up alongside and let us have it. I want you out of here before that happens." He leaned forward and spoke sharply to the driver, giving him instructions, slipping him a ten dollar bill to insure obedience. They were close to Lisa's now. The windows were brightly lit. She hadn't gone to work yet.

"Jim," the boy whispered. "Thank you for coming. I—"

Jim's hand squeezed his arm.

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Then he reached forward and unlatched the door. The cab was slowing down toward the curb. A quick look behind showed the second cab coming closer. Jim opened the door.

"Now!" he shouted at David, and as the boy hesitated he gave him a sharp push and sent him sprawling on the sidewalk. Jim slammed the door shut and his cab jerked forward. The second cab was almost on their rear bumper. Jim hunched down in the seat. He had visions of the old gangster technique—a car drawing alongside, then the chatter of a tommygun.

Jim's driver was doing an expert job trying to shake the pursuer, but the second cab clung to them like a leech, now about twenty-five yards behind. They were getting back toward the center of town.

"Is there still an arcade through the Penman Building?" Jim asked the driver.

"Yeah!"

"Pull up in front of it and I'll make a run for it."

"Okay, mister—and don't think I'll be sorry to lose you!"

The Penman Building came into view, and Jim's cab eased over toward the curb. Jim leaped, stumbling to his hands and knees, then struggled up and raced through the arcade. He heard the squealing brakes of the second cab. He ran out the far end of the arcade and ducked into an alley between buildings, gasping for breath. Seconds later the man in the sports coat skidded out onto the sidewalk. He stood there for a moment, looking anxiously up and down the street, and then ran straight past the alley and was gone.

Jim leaned against the brick wall of the building, trying to steady his wits. Suddenly his eyes focused on a row of lighted windows on the second floor of an office building across the way. It had happened without design, but here he was, looking at the windows of the Zabala Importing Corporation.

A kind of fury suddenly shook Jim. Zabala! He had just found his son—found a part of him that had been missing all these years—and now Zabala meant to destroy it. He couldn't go on living in fear the rest of his life. He had to settle it. He had to settle it now.

Jim came out of the alley and walked to a little stationery store on the corner. There was a pay phone in the rear. He called police headquarters and asked for Lieutenant Magee.

"There ain't any Lieutenant Magee," the desk sergeant said.

"George Magee!" Jim insisted.

There was a chuckle at the other end. "Your name ain't Rip Van Winkle, is it, bud? George Magee is the police commissioner."

"How do I reach him?"

"You don't. What is it you want him for?"

"Give him a message then," Jim said. "Tell him Jim Hammond called. Tell him I'm going to settle

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things once and for all with Zabala. Tell him if he doesn't hear from me again, he'll know where to look."

He jammed down the receiver and went out of the store. He walked across the street and into the office building, climbed the stairs and stood outside the doors of the Zabala Importing Corporation. Reason and common sense were going to have to win the day, but, one way or another, there would be an end to fear.

Jim's hand closed on the knob, he took a deep breath, and pushed open the door. There, sitting behind the desk facing him, was swarthy Mike Zabala, staring straight at him—waiting for him.

"Now listen to me, Zabala!" Jim began.

Zabala stared at him, not a muscle twitching, not an eyelid blinking. Jim felt his legs begin to cave under him. Zabala didn't move or speak. He couldn't. There was a round black hole directly between his eyes. Mike Zabala was dead.

For a moment Jim's whole concentration was directed to restoring his own equilibrium. It was as if every ounce of strength had drained out of him and somehow he had to breathe it back into his lungs. Slowly he felt his heartbeat grow more regular. There was no sound of anyone in the other rooms of the office. He became aware of the faint smell of cordite. The shot which had killed Zabala couldn't have been fired very long ago. His eyes searched the desk and the floor around the desk and chair. There was no gun.

He found he could move, and for no planned reason he began, cautiously, to circle the dead man in his chair, as if, somehow, by looking at the scene from another angle he would learn something more. Through his head echoed the sound of his own voice on the phone to the desk sergeant: "Tell Magee I'm going to settle things once and for all with Zabala." He was standing behind the dead man now, looking over his head at the desk top. Then for the second time he felt his knees sag. Facing on the desk was an appointment pad. Names that had been listed for earlier in the day had been crossed out. Opposite the time notation of 7:30 P.M. was the only clear name. It was *James Hammond.*

It made absolutely no sense. Zabala had written down his name for an appointment Jim had never made! Or *was* it senseless? Jim glanced at his watch. It was just a quarter to eight. Had seven thirty been the time Zabala had ordered the man in the sports coat to produce Jim for an interview?

Jim reached out toward the pad to tear off the sheet, and then drew back. You have to think in a crisis—think clearly. You have to make sense. The trouble most innocent people got into was from not playing it straight when they were in hot water. The thing to do was go straight to Commissioner Magee and

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tell him the whole story. Magee had been his friend years ago, and he would listen without the instant prejudice of the patrolman on the street.

Jim walked out of the office, closing the door behind him, went down the flight of stairs to the street and across to the stationery store again. He searched through the phone book and found George Magee's home phone. He called the number and a woman answered. Mr. Magee was out but he was expected home any minute.

"Will you tell him Jim Hammond called and ask him to stay home till I get there. It's very urgent."

Magee lived about three miles from the center of town. Jim paid off his cab and walked up to the old white colonial house. There was a light burning on the porch and his finger had only touched the doorbell when the door was opened by Magee himself. He hadn't changed much. Not quite as tall looking, because his shoulders had acquired a stoop; his hair was grayer; and the shrewd blue eyes looked wearier.

"Come in," he said, his tone grim. Jim realized that he knew something already. "I've just had a report that Mike Zabala has been murdered, I also have the message you left with the desk sergeant that you were going to settle with him. What happened?"

"It's going to sound crazy," Jim said. They had sat down side by side on a bench in the entrance hall. Jim told Magee the whole story from start to finish. "You'll think I wasn't sane, going to the office that way. But I tell you, Magee, I couldn't stand being afraid of him any more. I had to settle it, one way or the other. I'd found my boy—I couldn't live this way any more."

"You have a gun?" Magee asked.

"Yes, and I have a permit for it. But I wasn't carrying it. I left it in the bureau in my hotel room."

For the first time Magee's face relaxed. He lit a fresh cigarette from the stub of the one he'd been smoking. "Maybe we can put you in the clear," he said. "Zabala's body is on the way to the morgue for an autopsy. The medical examiner will dig the bullet out of his head. We take your gun down to headquarters and fire a couple of slugs out of it. They won't match the murder bullet, and you'll be a lot closer to being in the clear."

"Am I under arrest?" Jim asked.

Magee's face was grave. "Look, Jim, I always liked you. I'm trying to give you a break. But Walt Rogovin, the D.A., is strictly a Zabala man. You know this town. Rogovin will break an arm to pin this on you. He'll have to if he wants to stay in right with his crowd. I'm not arresting you, but we're going to have to move fast before Rogovin has a warrant sworn out for you. Let's go."

They drove to the Mansion House in Magee's car. Magee said they'd always known someone would get Zabala sooner or later. It was a

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cockeyed coincidence that Jim had turned up in town the very day it had happened.

At the Mansion House they went up to Jim's room. Jim crossed to the bureau and opened the drawer.

"Don't touch it!" Magee said sharply. Cigarette dangling between his lips, Magee crossed to the bureau, took a handkerchief from his pocket, and lifted out the .45. He raised it to his nose and sniffed the barrel. He frowned.

"Been fired fairly recently," he said.

"I fool around with it at home," Jim said. "Probably forgot to clean it."

Magee grunted and dropped the handkerchief-wrapped gun into his pocket. They went back downstairs and drove to police headquarters in Magee's car.

"Your name on that appointment pad," Magee muttered. "That beats everything for coincidence. Still, your explanation is probably the right one."

At police headquarters Magee made no objection to Jim's watching the test with his gun. A patrolman took it and fired it two or three times into what looked like a barrel stuffed with cotton wadding.

"He'll dig those slugs out and compare them with the one the doc gets out of Zabala's head," Magee said. "It'll be a little while yet before the ballistics man can make a comparison. You'd better wait in my office while I see what's going on." He took a deep drag on his cigarette. "Better tell them you're here with me before they send out a general alarm for you."

Jim settled in a big leather armchair in the commissioner's office. He suddenly realized how close to exhaustion he was. There had been enough emotional tension in his meeting with David to make it a rough day. The rest had pretty nearly finished him, now that the action was almost over.

It wasn't the crime that occupied his mind. He was thinking of David. The boy had had it! Sixteen years of insecurity; no father, and a mother who had probably never shown him any real affection; a mother, drinking most of the time and always with a strange man in tow. There had been nothing for the boy to be proud of—no father to look up to, no mother who fitted into a pattern of which society approved. Of course the boy had withdrawn from sports; of course he had no friends. He had been afraid that the truth about the nothingness in his life would be revealed—that he was deserted, unloved. And finally, in emotional desperation, he had stolen a book which he hoped might justify Lisa and make him feel less ashamed. Lord, there was so much Jim could now do for the boy—so much that needed doing.

Jim closed his eyes and actually dozed off.

How much later the door opened he couldn't guess. He blinked up at

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Magee who had come back into the office, accompanied by a dark-complexioned man with beady black eyes and a head as bald as an egg. Magee walked over to the desk.

"This is Mr. Rogovin, the D.A.," he said. "It looks like we have to start over again, Jim."

"What do you mean?"

"It was your gun," Magee said. He sat down on the edge of his desk, and his eyes looked tired.

"But that's impossible!" Jim said.

"It's an unquestionable fact," Magee said, in a low, dull voice.

"But *how?* We found the gun exactly where I left it."

Then Rogovin took the ball. He had a harsh, driving voice. "Let's drop the act, Hammond. You came back here to Bridgewater to kill Mike Zabala. You made an appointment with him. You went up to his office and shot him dead with your own gun."

"I wasn't after Zabala!" Jim said. "He was after me."

"Zabala forgot long ago that you were even alive!" Rogovin said. "Why would he want to knock off a punk newspaper reporter? When you called him he made an appointment with you. Why not? He didn't know you'd been nursing this grudge for fifteen years."

Anger made Jim's tongue thick. "I haven't nursed any grudge. I came to Bridgewater to see my son. I hadn't been here an hour before one of Zabala's men began tailing me."

"So you say."

"My son can testify to it."

"Naturally he would. Any kind of decent boy would do what he could to help his father—even lie for him!"

"There's the taxi driver. He'll know what happened. And I called the police and told them I was going to see Zabala. Would I do that if I planned to kill him?"

"You told the police you were going to 'settle' with Zabala!" Rogovin said, his jaw jutting forward.

"I can identify the man who tailed me," Jim said.

"We'll give you a chance to look at all the pictures in the Gallery," Rogovin said, and Jim suddenly realized he wasn't going to find the right picture there. Rogovin was too sure. Jim looked at Magee for help, but Magee's face was expressionless. He was the police commissioner now, not a friend.

"Who knew you were coming to Bridgewater?" Rogovin asked.

"Only my wife," Jim said.

"Lisa Hammond?"

"Not Lisa Hammond. My wife—back home where I live."

"Where is that?"

Cold fear began to creep down Jim's back. Rogovin would try to work Kathy over. "I don't think I'll answer that."

"We'll find out. Lisa Hammond will know," Rogovin said. "And didn't Lisa Hammond send for you? Magee tells me she did."

"She said my boy was in trouble

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and suggested I help him. I didn't say I would come. Even if she thought I was coming she had no way of knowing exactly when."

"Okay. According to your own story, then, only your wife back home knew. So I ask you: how could Zabala have someone waiting to tail you?"

Jim couldn't answer that. It was not Kathy, of course, who had warned Zabala. Lisa might have—yet knowing Lisa, it didn't make sense. If anything happened to Jim, those fat monthly checks would stop coming.

"It could have been pure accident—one of Zabala's men just happened to spot me."

"Did you recognize this man who tailed you?"

"No."

"Then how could he recognize you?"

"I could have been pointed out to him sometime."

"But you haven't been in Bridgewater for thirteen years." Rogovin made a gesture of impatience. "The undeniable facts are that you made an appointment with Zabala, that you went to see him and shot him dead, that you took your gun back to the hotel and then tried to play it sweet and innocent with Commissioner Magee. Isn't that the simple truth of what happened?"

"No. I told Magee how it was."

"Okay," Rogovin said. "Let's start over at the beginning." He loosened his tie and undid the top button of his shirt. Magee was staring at Jim through a haze of cigarette smoke. "Now," Rogovin went on, "let's begin with your arrival. When did you reach Bridgewater?"

So it began, and it went on and on. Rogovin seemed to be tireless. He took Jim over his story. He questioned him about it. He made him tell it again. He pounced on a change of word here, a minor change of detail there. On and on and on. Jim thanked God that he was telling the truth. Rogovin would have smashed a false story to bits and pieces.

Maybe it was an hour, maybe two hours, before the office door opened and a slightly familiar figure, accompanied by a patrolman, came in. Rogovin turned angrily.

"What do you want, Sommers?"

Ed Sommers, a local lawyer! Years ago Jim had played golf and fished with him. Sommers was a little plumper, his blond hair a little thinner at the temples.

"I'm Jim Hammond's lawyer," he said, grinning at Jim, "—if he'll have me."

"Ed! Boy, am I glad to see you! You certainly *are* my lawyer."

"Well, your time with your client will come later," Rogovin said.

"I've got a witness who'll put an end to all this nonsense," Sommers said. "I suggest you see him before you waste any more time trying to get Jim to change a true story."

"Who is your witness?" Rogovin demanded.

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"David Hammond," Sommers said blandly.

"The man's son! For Pete's sake, Sommers, do you think for a minute—"

"—and Jim's ex-wife, if he can stand it, and her boy friend. The last two aren't exactly willing witnesses, but they insist on being present. You better talk to the boy, Rogovin, or they'll be pinning donkey tails on you when you walk down the street." Sommers didn't wait for an answer; he went to the door and gestured to someone out of sight.

Almost instantly David came into the room, looking white and frightened. He went straight past Sommers to his father.

"You—you all right, Jim?"

"I couldn't be finer!" Jim said, and he meant it. The anxiety in the boy's voice was like a tonic. David was concerned. He actually was concerned.

Then followed horror.

Lisa was staring at Jim from the doorway—Lisa, whose blonde hair was no longer natural; Lisa, whose red gash of a mouth curled in a sneer; Lisa, gone soft and flabby, her eyes bloodshot. Behind her was a dark, gaudy man, looking cheap in an expensive plaid sports shirt.

"You stinker!" Lisa said to Jim. "Mixing my kid up in a murder."

The man in the sports shirt spoke to Rogovin. "Lisa's the kid's legal guardian," he said. "He's not of age. She's got a right to make him come home with her."

"But I can't go," David said, in a quavering voice, "until I tell what I know."

"One thing you know is the kind of guy your father is, without my having to tell you," Lisa said.

"Yes, mother, I do," David said. He turned to Sommers. "They can't make me go, can they, Mr. Sommers, until I tell what I know?"

Sommers's smile was grim. "They'll be crazy if they do," he said.

"All right, kid, let's have it," Rogovin said, impatiently. "Just what do you know?"

"I know that Mike Zabala was killed with Jim's gun, and I know who killed him!"

There was a moment of dead silence and then Lisa laughed. "Always daydreaming! Like somebody in a booby hatch!"

Sommers took charge. "Go on, David," he said. "Tell them what you told me when you came for help."

David looked anxiously at Jim. "I suppose you've told them about the man who followed us, Jim—and how you pushed me out of the taxi?"

"I've told them everything, exactly as it happened, David."

That seemed to take a load off David's mind. "I watched your cab drive off, Jim, and the other one following. But I didn't go into the house. Mother and Mr. Benson were there." He nodded toward the man in the sports shirt.

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"Just so you know who I am, Hammond," Benson said. "I own the night club where Lisa works."

"I was scared for you," David said, his eyes fixed on Jim. "It's funny, but I hardly ever believed the story of how you left Bridgewater—how you were a big hero and got Tony Zabala electrocuted and had to leave town because it wasn't safe here for you. I mean—I knew it was true about Tony Zabala, because I read it in the old newspaper files. But I—well, I thought you left town because you didn't want me—because you didn't want to be my father."

"David, I told you—"

"I know," David said, his eyes very bright. "And when they followed us—and all that—I suddenly knew it was true. You left town because Mike Zabala was going to kill you if he could. And you knew that when—when you came back today to help me. And suddenly, all I wanted to do was to help you."

"David!" Jim said.

"So I didn't go into the house. I hailed the next taxi that came and I went back to the Mansion House. I was sick I was so—so scared for you, Jim. I figured if you got away from that man you'd go back to the hotel. I telephoned your room but you didn't answer. I—I was afraid to wait in the lobby where anyone could see me. I thought maybe Mike Zabala would—would kidnap me, or something—you know, to make it harder for you?"

"Go on, David," Sommers said.

"One of the night bellboys at the Mansion House is in my class at school. I said I was waiting for my father and I'd like to wait in his room. This boy said it was against the rules, but he took me upstairs and let me into your room, Jim, with a passkey." He stopped, as though the next step was too difficult.

"And so you waited for me—only I didn't come back," Jim said.

"I waited—and I sort of looked at things," the boy said, his eyes lowered. "The books you brought with you—the Dylan Thomas book and the one about India. I looked at your clothes in the closet and I—I wanted to feel them. Because they were yours, Jim. And then—then I went to the bureau and opened the drawer."

"David!" Jim said sharply. "Just a minute, son. If you're going to tell us what I think you are, I want to advise you against it. If you took that gun out of the drawer and—and did anything with it, I don't want you to tell about it now."

"There wasn't any gun in the drawer," David said, his eyes wide.

"Of course there wasn't," Rogovin said. "Hammond had it—he was killing Zabala with it."

David looked down at his shoe tops. "While I was looking in the drawer—at Jim's handkerchiefs—I heard someone put a key in the lock. I couldn't be sure it was Jim. I thought it might be a chambermaid, and if she found me there

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she'd make me leave. So I ducked into the bathroom, and I kept the door open just wide enough to see who it was."

"Was it a maid?" Sommers asked.

"No, sir. It was a man. He had a gun in his hand—wrapped in a handkerchief. He went over to the bureau and dropped it in with Jim's handkerchiefs and then went out again."

"You saw him clearly?" Rogovin asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Could you identify him if you saw him again?"

"Yes, sir."

"Describe him."

"I don't have to describe him, sir," David said. His lips trembled slightly. "You see, it was Mr. Magee."

The room was deathly still for a minute. Magee's gray face seemed to soften. "You should be very proud of your boy, Jim. That was a real good try—if a little fantastic." He smiled at David. "I'd be proud of you, if you were my kid."

David looked at Rogovin. "But I'm telling the truth," he said. "I'm not inventing things."

Jim's jaw muscles tightened. No, David wasn't inventing things. Suddenly he knew this boy. He *was* telling the truth.

"You only saw this man through the crack in the door," Sommers said, quietly. "Couldn't it possibly have been someone who just looked like Mr. Magee?"

"No, sir. It was Mr. Magee. I'd seen him before, sir. He was at our house—last night. I heard him talking to mother and Mr. Benson."

"What were they talking about?"

"You dirty little eavesdropper!" Lisa shouted at the boy.

David didn't look at her. "I—I didn't hear the beginning, sir. But they were talking about Jim—my father. And I heard Mr. Magee say Jim would never come back to Bridgewater if *Lisa* asked him. He said he was something of a psychologist, and he'd bet a hat Jim would come back for *me*. 'He'll come back if he thinks the boy needs him'—that's exactly what he said."

Jim was looking past David at Magee, who was still smiling as though he couldn't believe what he heard. "It ought to be simple to test, Magee," Jim said. "If you've fired a gun recently a paraffin test would show it. If you haven't, the test will clear you."

"This is all a lot of nonsense!" Rogovin said.

Sommers smiled pleasantly. "I'd hate to see you cross-examine this kid in court, Rogovin," he said. "You're not going to be able to browbeat him and a jury's going to like him. Why not have Magee take the paraffin test?"

Magee inhaled on his cigarette and then shrugged. "Why not?" he said. "Jim, this boy of yours seems to have inherited your talent for fiction. But why not? I don't mind taking a paraffin test."

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It was a strange procession which went downstairs to the police laboratory. Magee led the way and explained what was wanted to the technician in charge.

"This young man," he said, smiling at David, "says that I shot Mike Zabala. We're going to prove him wrong, Bert."

It took time. The technician melted some clear, filtered white paraffin until it had just melted, and then sprayed it all over Magee's right hand and wrist. He then coated this with cotton and sprayed more paraffin over that. While he waited for the paraffin to cool the technician prepared a liquid in a glass retort. Then he peeled the wax cast off Magee's hand and poured some of the liquid into it. Magee, after flexing his fingers, lit a cigarette and watched. The paraffin cast remained dead-white. Magee smiled.

"Well, Jim? Satisfied?" he asked.

"I knew this was a crazy waste of time," Rogovin said.

"I've seen this done before when I was a police reporter," Jim said. "Sometimes it takes fifteen or twenty minutes for the blue specks to show up."

The technician nodded. "Mr. Hammond's right," he said.

No one spoke after that. Magee watched, smiling; the others were tense. And then, suddenly, the smile seemed to freeze on Magee's lips. Inside the cast a faint spattering of dark blue specks began to appear. Jim, his arm around David's shoulder, faced the gray police commissioner.

"Jim!" David cried. "Does that prove I was telling the truth?"

"Well, Magee?" Jim said.

Magee dropped his cigarette on the floor, stepped on it, and then lit a fresh one with hands that were quite steady. "If you know anything at all about this test, Jim, you know it's far from infallible," he said. "I've seen a cop fire a half dozen rounds of ammunition and then take the test—and it would show nothing. It was a fifty-fifty chance. I had to take it to break the kid's story. I've gambled at worse odds than that all my life. Well, this time I lost."

"You killed him?" Jim said. "You tried to frame me?"

"I killed him," Magee said. "And we tried to frame you."

"Shut up, you crazy fool!" Lisa shouted.

Magee turned to the dumfounded Rogovin. "Better get a couple of cops in here, Walt. There are three arrests to be made."

Benson looked as if he would try to run for it but Rogovin was already at the door, calling to someone outside.

"I was an honest cop in the beginning," Magee said. "Long time honest—long time no dough. I wasn't getting anywhere. You know who runs this town, Jim. We couldn't protect you in the old days. I couldn't get promoted. Honest cop. So I began to play along with Mike

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Zabala. All I had to do was keep my eyes closed at the right times. Funny thing, Jim," and Magee took a drag on his cigarette, "Zabala forgot his mad at you a long time ago. Rogovin was right about that. He knew you were just doing your job. He knew he couldn't kill a newspaperman at any time without too much heat generating. You could have come back here any time you wanted and if he'd have met you on the street he'd have laughed with you over the threats he made a long time ago. Only you didn't know that, Jim."

"And lived in a kind of hell for thirteen years!" Jim said.

"I just never thought it was necessary to let you know. Somehow it seemed you'd realize it yourself," Magee said. "I got along with Zabala, made my gravy, got to be police commissioner. Then Benson came to me. He was one of us. Between us we could cut the cake two ways instead of only getting a small slice apiece—*if* Zabala was out of the way. After a while we thought about you, Jim."

"I was to take the rap for you," Jim said.

"No, Jim, honestly," Magee said. "Believe me—and I think Mr. Sommers will back me up—you'd have got off. Even though they had you dead to rights, you'd have got off. Justifiable homicide. You'd have had a rough time, but you'd have got off." He took another deep drag on his cigarette. "It would be easy to frame you if we could get you here legitimately. I knew you'd never come back to help Lisa. But when the boy got in trouble—that was just what we'd been looking for. I know the kind of guy you are, Jim. I knew you'd come quick.

"We waited for you—we picked you up—we had one of Benson's boys tail you. He wasn't to bother you unless you came back to the hotel too soon." Magee laughed. "I was going to leave a handkerchief or a cuff link or something in Zabala's office. But—when I found the gun, it was too good to pass up." He shook his head slowly. "That boy of yours—I knew he had me cold unless the paraffin test came up negative. It was a fifty-fifty chance, like I said. You got lucky at last, Jim. The blue specks showed up for you."

Jim's arm tightened around David's shoulder. "It was a sure thing, Commissioner," he said. "I didn't know if you'd fired the gun, but I knew the test would show positive."

Magee looked at him, puzzled. "But how—"

"I guess I know more about it even than you, Commissioner. One of the reasons the paraffin test isn't dependable evidence on the question of shooting a gun is that it will show positive for other reasons. It's the nitrate in gunpowder that produces those blue specks, but there are other things that will produce them too. A farmer who handles certain fertilizers will show positive;

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same with miners who handle explosives; firecrackers will produce the specks—also certain foods and cosmetics." Jim smiled slowly. *"And tobacco!* You're a chain-smoker, Magee. Those blue specks had to come up. I was gambling they'd make you talk."

Magee looked at the cigarette he was smoking, gave a short laugh, and dropped it on the floor. Then he raised his eyes to David's.

"Your old man is a pretty smart cookie, kid," he said.

"Yes, sir," David said, and it seemed to Jim he was a little taller and straighter than he had been before.

COMING ATTRACTIONS . . .

Next Month	new stories by Stanley Ellin and Michael Gilbert
October issue	Special Award of Merit story; also Agatha Christie and Nelson Algren
November issue	new stories by Robert Bloch and Frederick Nebel; also Cornell Woolrich and Thomas Walsh
December issue	new stories by Rufus King and Shirley Barker; also Herbert Brean and John Steinbeck
January issue	*ALL-NEW* issue including stories by Wade Miller and Christianna Brand

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **THOMAS KYD**

TITLE: ***Cottage for August***

TYPE: Suspense-Horror Story

LOCALE: Annisquam, Massachusetts

TIME: August 1949

COMMENTS: *An encounter with pure evil that you will never quite forget—and some gorgeous dialogue that will renew your faith in the Art of Conversation. A distinguished story.*

PROFESSOR HINMAN (MATHEMATICS) joined his colleagues in the Wurzhaus booth, and signaled for a sandwich and beer.

"You, too, I presume," said Professor Parks (English), "have looked on Beauty bare."

"True," said Professor Hinman, "but less frequently than I should wish."

There was an approving chuckle from Professor Mendel (Romance Languages).

"The phrase," said Parks, "was originally applied to Euclid. I wasn't thinking of you as lover-manqué."

Mendel defrothed his mustache with a paper napkin. "It's an odd thing. At faculty meetings we twitter. In class we drone. Here we talk like professors. Probably it's the beer."

"We've been discussing absolutes," explained Parks. "What would you say? Is it possible to produce samples of pure beauty, pure love, pure evil, and so on?—like samples of pure sulphur or copper?"

Hinman looked thirstily toward the counter. He was slight and unimposing, but people liked to hear his opinions. "There's no such thing as pure sulphur or copper. We call things *chemically* pure when they meet certain practical tests. I should say we might treat your absolutes in somewhat the same way."

"Precisely," said Parks. He tapped a column in his *Times*. "And here's

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'chemically' pure evil. It meets any test."

"Test? What test?" This from Professor Katz (Social Sciences). He lifted his dedicated shoulders.

"Katz has been telling us," said Parks, "that this incident reported in the *Times* should be thought of as an explosion of social tension. Three New York urchins attacked a Columbia freshman for his pocket money—exactly one dollar and fifty-five cents. Then they calmly clubbed him to death."

"I didn't say it was pretty!" Katz's voice rose several decibles. "It's hideous, it's terrifying. But so is the sight of a python swallowing a sheep."

Hinman received his beer with thanks, and took a reflective sip. "You mean that clubbing a Columbia freshman is only natural?"

"In a sense, yes—for those particular boys. You've seen Morningside Heights, and how its grandeur rises on the edge of Harlem. Just take a look sometime from below on 116th Street."

"I have. When I taught there, I used to forget the switch on the subway at 96th."

"Those boys weren't just clubbing another boy. They were clubbing the University and the Heights. In a way, they were clubbing their own ignorance and confusion."

"But they took the dollar fifty-five."

"Plus," said Mendel fairly, "one nickel-plated wrist watch."

Hinman worked on his sandwich for a moment.

"I think Katz has a point."

Parks sighed. "Here we go! You science people can analyze good and evil out of existence."

"Not at all," said Hinman. He nodded at the paper. "That's evil, but not *pure* evil—not so long as there's an explanation, even a bad explanation like Katz's."

Parks was silent, suspecting a trick.

"My point's simple enough," Hinman went on. "How can you have pure evil so long as you can imagine worse? What if that freshman had been clubbed by a fellow-freshman? The evil of the act would have been less divisible by Katz's social factor, or any other factor. Pure evil should be indivisible."

Mendel nodded. "I get it—a moving scale, determined by the increasing stature of the evil doer and the decreasing size of his prize. It would be purer evil if he had been clubbed by a freshman, still purer if he had been clubbed by a sophomore, and so on up the line—until he's clubbed by the Dean for half a buck, or by the Provost just for fun."

Park's expression showed that he considered this levity in poor taste, but Hinman put it to use.

"Killing for fun, or for no reason at all, takes us out of the realm of evil into that of mental disease. The motive must be inadequate but understandable. Katz could put this better than I can, but how's this for a test? It approaches pure evil if

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some fortunate and intelligent human being, of recognizably normal tastes, is willing to deprive another human being of life for the sake of a petty personal convenience."

They thought this over a moment, then Mendel spoke with unusual seriousness. "I don't like your word 'willing.' Last summer I worked at the Huntington Library, and rented one of the little twin villas they have out there, perched on the edge of a canyon. Everything was fine except that the old lady next door had a queer little cough. It was like popping bubble-gum, and it came every fifteen seconds on the second. Our two places had a common drive along the ledge of the canyon, and soon I was calculating the chances of her car plunging over. My God, gentlemen, she was just a nice little old lady, but in my mind I was murdering her every day!"

"But you took no action."

"The devil I didn't! I began pestering her with warnings about that drive as much as she pestered me with her cough. Bad conscience."

Even Parks grinned, and Hinman nodded affectionately. "You're in the clear, Mendel. I think evil impulses must be what is meant by 'Original Sin.' Acting on them in reverse is 'Salvation by Grace.'"

He paused in sudden recollection. Then he spoke in a new tone.

"Still, a mere thought *can* be a sample of pure evil. So can an act of omission. Do you men have two o'clock classes?"

"Why?" asked Katz, glancing at his watch.

"I have an experience to tell you about. Mendel's story reminded me of it. An encounter with pure evil. I think it meets the test."

Their reply was to order more beer.

"I warn you this is unpleasant—so much so that my mind had almost plowed it under. Then a moment ago it came through clear again, as if it had happened yesterday. You're sure you want to hear it?"

They nodded.

"It was seven years ago, during the summer of 1949. That was my first year here, and the only time I've taught the summer session. It was hot, even for Cambridge, and Martha and the children almost perished. We had a top-floor apartment on Walker Street. It came to a boil when the sun hit the roof, and kept simmering all night long. We had been spending summers at a South Jersey beach, and scarcely knew what hot spells meant. The two girls were eight and nine. They and Martha just panted, and looked at me reproachfully. The boy cried. He was two, and had prickly heat that had become infected."

Parks, who was a bachelor, stirred uneasily. Hinman reassured him. "This isn't a tale of domestic squalor. That part's already over . . . At the beginning of August I knew we couldn't take it any longer, but the session had the full month more to run. I had to wait until the week's

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classes were over, then on a Saturday, August third, I made an expedition to Cape Anne. Martha had a doctor's appointment for the baby, so I couldn't use the car. I arrived on the earliest train, and began phoning real estate offices from the Gloucester station. If I could rent a cottage for August, the family could get out of Walker Street, and I could come up weekends.

"My chances, I knew, were dim. The heat had been driving people to the shore in droves, and this was past the mid-season rental period. My best bet, I had been told, was Annisquam, since it was slightly off the tourist track. I kept dropping nickels in the phone, and kept being told that I was wasting my time. The last office on my list gave me the usual answer, but with one slight addition. I might try the Annisquam antique dealer, a man named Mr. Potts. I called up Mr. Potts. There was no answer, but I got a taxi to his shop and finally tracked him down.

"Potts looked like a kindly old Uncle. He was a typical Yankee trader—all homespun simplicity on the outside, and solid granite inside. He might have something, but then again he might not—he wasn't exactly sure. When he learned I was a professor, he seemed more inclined to think he might have something. He had a nephew at the University. Did I know him? I didn't, but we discussed his nephew at considerable length. There we sat among his dusty antiques, me eyeing him like a spaniel.

"At last he came to the point. Actually there *was* an empty cottage, a nice one at a reasonable figure, but in a sort of way it was already rented. A young couple had left a deposit in early June, but they hadn't appeared on August first to pay the balance and take possession. Time was a-passing by, and it didn't seem exactly right to take the risk that they wouldn't show up, and thus make the owner take a loss. I agreed fervently that it didn't seem right at all. But on the other hand, he said, it didn't seem right to risk arrangements with a brand-new person either—unless that person paid cash on the nail.

"I fairly lunged for my wallet. I hadn't seen the cottage, but I paid the rental in full. I also paid the telephone deposit, ditto gas, ditto electricity, ditto water. I also signed a number of documents in triplicate. When we were through, never had rights of occupancy been more firmly secured—nor the cash considerations.

"Potts then drove me to the cottage. It wasn't simply nice, it was perfect. It was completely isolated at the edge of a big estate on a crescent of water called Sapphire Cove. It faced west, so that you would get the sunsets over the vast blue sweep of Ipswich Bay. Most wonderful of all, it was at least thirty degrees cooler than Walker Street, and within twenty feet of deep water.

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"The granite in Potts had receded the moment the money changed hands. He showed me around like a friendly neighbor—four airy bedrooms, a neat kitchen, a huge living room, even a little country garden. We walked out to the water."

Hinman drew out a pencil and reached for a paper napkin.

"This is the part you must follow carefully. Here's the porch of the cottage. You walk over twenty feet of lawn, and you're on this level outcropping of brown rock. Ten feet below—just a nice dive—is the surface of the water, about twelve feet deep and so clear you can see bottom. Alongside the rock is a tier of natural stone steps, leading to a bit of steep shingle with a rowboat beached on its edge. You get the picture? In ten seconds a person on the rock could get to that boat, and in ten more seconds could be out in the water. From the cottage itself the operation might take ten to fifteen seconds more."

They nodded their understanding.

"When I asked Potts what the water was like, I got the usual New England joke. He winked and said it was 'bracing.' He also said there was a beach at the far end of the cove that would be safer bathing for the children. Since my girls were like little seals, I told him I wasn't worried. Then he went off in his car."

Parks interrupted. "You mean Potts isn't the villain of this piece?"

"Lord, no! Just a man who rented me a cottage."

Mendel protested. "Look, Hinman. In the annals of evil the miscreant is supposed to appear early and often. You're the only character left."

A curious look flickered over Hinman's face. He seemed about to say something, then switched to something else. "Two more 'characters' as you call them are about to appear. Just let me go on. I went back to the cottage to wait for Martha and the children. I had called her as soon as the deal was closed. The plan was for her to drive up and inquire for Pott's antique shop, then he would guide her to the cottage. She was due to arrive about two o'clock. I decided to make up some of the sleep I had been losing, and stretched out on the porch swing.

"It was after one when I woke up, and of course I was feeling logey. When it dawned on me where I was, the thought of that water out front came to me like a blessing. I stripped to my underpants and stepped out to the rock. But before I could dive, I heard a motor and watched a car rounding the drive. It wasn't Martha."

"Enter the miscreants," whispered Mendel.

"It was a Mr. and Mrs. Durham." Hinman paused, concentrating. "I wish I could make you see them. We've spoken of fortunate, intelligent people. Add youth—they were still in their twenties or very early

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thirties—complete ease of manner and remarkable good looks. He was built like a decathlon competitor, and had the appropriately crisp light hair and classic features. She was a quite lovely brunette, with a stunning figure. Her shorts and striped basque shirt let you see her perfect tan, and let you guess at all the rest."

Mendel murmured appreciatively. "Noble man and nubile lady. I see them—or at least her."

Hinman's failure to respond to this sally was the measure of his present dead-seriousness. His mood communicated itself to them, and they stirred a little uneasily.

"They were quite cultivated people and expert dispensers of charm—as I realized the moment they joined me on the rock. Sorry to inconvenience me, they said after introducing themselves, but they had just arrived, and Mr. Potts had sent them to explain. By the way, it turned out that this wasn't so—the visit was their own idea. Explain what? I asked, although I had already guessed. On the drive was their sports car, top down, and back seat piled high with luggage, including golf bags and painting easels. Their explanation came with easy fluency. They were the couple who had originally rented the cottage. They had arrived a few days after the beginning of their month because this was the first weekend and Mr. Durham's vacation had just begun.

"I realized I had a mean situation on my hands. In a sense, of course, they were in the right. All ten points of the law were with me, but that scarcely canceled their claim. If a third party had been considering who should have that cottage—the Hinmans or the Durhams—his decision would depend entirely on whether he was their friend or ours."

It was Katz's turn to interrupt. "You say Potts isn't the villain of this piece. I'm not so sure. What about his purely mercenary ethics—minimize your own risks regardless of the other fellow's?"

Hinman waited patiently until Katz had finished. Then he held out his two palms like the pans of a set of scales. "There were two factors that governed my reaction. I'll try to describe them as objectively as I can. First of all, the Durham's approach was wrong. If they had been just a little shy and uncertain, discouraged but desperately hopeful, I might still have held on to the cottage as a family obligation, but I would have felt bad about it. But they didn't act that way. They were almost jolly about it. They either felt, or pretended to feel, complete assurance that I would just move over. They may have been using this technique—getting something by taking it for granted that it would be given—or they may just have been acting in character. Their whole attitude suggested that they were used to having their way. The world was their oyster, and bits of shell like

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myself could be casually flicked away. Behind their superficial graciousness, you could detect the hard core of egotism and the absolute conviction of superiority.

"The other factor is less creditable to myself. I was *feeling* their superiority and resenting it like the devil. There they were in all their handsome elegance, and there was I in my underpants. They were tanned, and I was the color of a flounder's belly. He was big and I was small. She was fresh as morning, and Martha, after a month in Cambridge, was looking as if she had been through a mangle. In the back of their car were golf clubs and easels, not babies with prickly heat. Need I say more?

"I was scrupulously polite, but I am sure I wasn't quite able to keep surliness out of my voice. My dealings, I said, had been with Mr. Potts, not with them. I had rented and paid for the cottage in good faith. My wife and children were on their way now. We needed the cottage, we had it, and we intended to keep it. I added that I was sorry and was sure Mr. Potts would return their deposit.

"One thing about my remarks, they were conclusive. Their effect upon Mr. and Mrs. Durham was remarkable. They didn't argue and they didn't scowl. Of course they didn't smile any longer either. Their faces simply became inanimate. It was as if they had suddenly turned into superlatively well-formed zombies. They still looked at me, but it was obvious that they no longer saw me. I felt extremely uncomfortable, especially since they made no move to leave. It's hard for a man to take even passive hostility from a beautiful woman, however little he may admire her, and I wanted an end of it. I mumbled a few more words of regret, made the obvious point that I had come out to swim, and then dived off the rock.

"Now this is bound to sound like an anticlimax. The moment I hit the water I understood why Annisquam was so cool. It was refrigerated by Ipswich Bay. I have felt cold water before—at Cape Cod and occasionally in South Jersey—but never anything like this. The July temperature in Massachusetts that year must have averaged ninety, but the water in that cove was nearer forty-five. I struck out in a hurry, hoping to warm up by activity. When I was about fifty yards offshore, I realized this was a mistake. I wasn't getting warm, I was getting numb. As I turned to hustle back to the rock, it occurred to me for the first time that it was just as well that someone was on it. The Durhams were there all right, in exactly their former positions, still silently watching me."

Hinman paused as he drank the last of his beer.

"Have any of you ever had a stomach cramp?"

They shook their heads.

"But you've had a leg cramp?"

They nodded.

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"Well, just imagine the same kind of thing extending from your groin to your solar plexus and right through to your spine. Your body becomes one knot of pain, and your legs seem to disappear. I had intimations on the way in, while the Durhams were still above my line of vision, but the thing struck squarely after I had come under the lee of the rock—when I was only eight or ten feet from safety. I went under, but I flailed my arms and came up again. I let out a scream for help. Now you may not think I would be conscious of this, but I was—my scream sounded dreadful, hoarse and animal-like. One other thing about it: it was loud—loud enough to be heard on the rock, in the cottage, anywhere about that cove. Then I went under again.

"You've heard of the mental processes of drowning men—the flashing pictures of past events, and so on. With me everything was strictly contemporary and, believe it or not, there was room in a corner of my mind for embarrassment. I was going to be fished out by the Durhams. How could I hang onto the cottage after that? When I came up the second time, my eyes went to the boat on the shingle. The Durhams weren't there. I didn't yell again. The truth came to me like revelation. They weren't going to be there.

"I'll have to take this up now from Martha's angle. After she got my call, she still had to take the baby to the doctor, and to stock up at the supermarket since I would have the car in Cambridge during the week. But with relief from the heat in sight, the two girls were cooperative and even the baby was less irritable. By eleven thirty she was packed up and away, and by one thirty she was in Pott's antique shop in Annisquam. They chatted a little, then he got in the car to guide her to the cottage.

"They were both surprised to see the Durhams sitting on the porch steps. Mr. Potts had told her of the mix-up, but had assured her there was nothing to worry about. They hadn't kept to their contract, so the cottage was ours. Still the sight of them rising politely as the car pulled up was rather disturbing. But both proved to be models of graciousness and charm. They helped unload the children and kept up a light banter about coming in second best for the prize. Where was I? I had gone in the water about fifteen minutes ago and was probably swimming around in the cove. They were wondering if it would be all right if they took a dip themselves before leaving.

"Then Martha saw me. As I emerged up those stone steps and weaved toward the cottage, I must have looked like a walking bundle of seaweed, but she said that all she could see were my black eyesockets in my dead-white face. That, and the fact that I wasn't even looking at her. I was looking at the Durhams.

"Rage is supposed to release adrenaline. Maybe that's what got me

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ashore. I had gone under again after I saw there was to be no rescue, and somehow I must have scrabbled my way to the slope. I remember dragging myself out along the gunwale of the boat. The cramp left the moment I was on the shingle, almost like a leg cramp when you step out of bed. But then I got sick. I retched everything out of my stomach, then lay exhausted on the stones. After five to ten minutes I heard the car pull up and the sound of voices.

"As Martha noticed, I didn't even see her. I didn't see Potts or the children. I saw only the Durhams. He had seen me as soon as Martha, and watched my approach with a complete poker-face—he was leaning nonchalantly against the rail of the porch. She was kneeling at the steps, her back toward me, playing with my little boy. I stopped behind her and said 'Mrs. Durham.' She looked up over her shoulder, and I caught her expression. What do you suppose it was?"

Katz and Mendel shook their heads. Parks cleared his throat to speak, then decided against it.

"Well, what would you think? Fear? Guilt? Shame?"

They waited.

"No," said Hinman, "none of those things. Just disappointment. Just plain, ordinary disappointment."

His listeners lifted their empty glasses to their lips like synchronized marionettes.

"I told her to take her hands off the child and get up. Then I told both of them to start moving. I lost control as they climbed into their car and I began to yell 'Murderers' at them. I kept it up until they had backed out of the drive, then I passed out. It was all right. I met my classes on Monday."

Hinman had known all three of his listeners for at least five years. Now they sat immobile, avoiding his eyes and each other's.

"Well, that's the story. I don't want you to comment on it because I know the spot you're in. You can't quite believe it. For one thing the setting is all wrong—atmospherically impossible. A summer rental at Annisquam. Popsicles and sand-in-the-shoes—of course. Pure evil—no. Furthermore, my facts may not be quite so reliable as I think they are. What if the Durhams didn't realize I was in trouble in that water?"

Hinman rubbed his hand over his eyes.

"In that case, you still have your sample of pure evil. Imagine *them* telling this story to *their* friends—about that ghastly little reptile who swiped their cottage from under their nose, then accused them of wanting to let him drown and his children become orphans. How could any human being think such a thing of other human beings! And all over what? Over nothing—over a cottage for August!"

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **RUFUS KING**

TITLE: ***To Remember You By***

TYPE: Detective Story

DETECTIVE: Will Blaine, insurance investigator

LOCALE: Halcyon, Florida

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Aurelia Maxon's plan to kill her husband was foolproof—at least, it had proved foolproof for her two former husbands . . .*

JANE MAXON, WHO WAS AN ONLY child and idolized her father, had just turned thirteen when her father contracted his fatal illness. This occurred on the morning following her birthday at which Maxon had given her, among her other presents, a gold locket, shaped as a heart, to be worn around her neck on a slender chain.

"Always," he said to her for some peculiar reason, "to remember me by."

"I don't have to remember you," Jane answered with clear logic, "because you are here."

The next day Fred Maxon announced at breakfast, "I feel a cold coming on. One of those things with chills."

Jane's stepmother Aurelia (a dazzling sort of woman whose make-up stood out frankly for the cosmetics that it was) put down her cup of hot chocolate and said with concern, "I'll telephone Dr. Campanelli and make an appointment."

"Nonsense, Aurelia. A couple of aspirins will do the trick."

"Fred, I insist. Your skin looks sort of yellow. It has that jaundice look."

Aurelia checked the flash of exultation in her eyes. At last the break had come after all her patient waiting: the genuine touch of illness that a doctor could earmark with a positive diagnosis—the genuine illness in which, during its clinical course and unfortunate ending, the doctor could

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retain complete confidence in his diagnosis.

Jaundice.

Aurelia considered the disease thoughtfully, rummaging in her extensive knowledge of medico-legal lore—a knowledge developed through the sad conclusion of two previous carefully concealed marriages.

. . . a subacute type of poisoning may develop if arsenic compounds are administered in small doses at repeated intervals . . . the victim may develop a toxic degeneration of the liver which progresses to an acute or subacute yellow atrophy accompanied by an intense toxic jaundice . . .

Dr. Campanelli agreed with Aurelia. It was jaundice, all right, but there was nothing to worry about. Dr. Campanelli had not, but should have, retired. He was seventy years old and had been in active practice in Halcyon (a town on the eastern seaboard of Florida somewhat north of Miami Beach) for the past thirty of them, after having disposed of his office in Michigan.

He was aware of the modern strides in medicine but he placed only cautious stock in them, maintaining that their beneficial effects were too capriciously offset by unhappy reactions to the newer, powerful drugs. He started his medication for Maxon by prescribing proper dosages of ammonium chloride for a catarrhal jaundice.

It irked Maxon to stay in bed. He was an active man and devoted to the sea. His great-grandfather had established the Maxon Line of cargo carriers and it was natural that this love for the waters of the earth should be in his blood.

"When I die," he had often said, "I want to be cremated and have my ashes scattered in the Atlantic Ocean."

It was an odd but not patently noticeable fact that Aurelia, of late, had taken to quoting him on it whenever she could do so without the remark seeming forced or obvious.

During the second week of Maxon's clinical course his eyes puffed up and he developed an intolerance to light, and Dr. Campanelli shifted his medication to Eyebright (euphrasia) as an astringent tonic.

For the third week of Maxon's by now debilitating illness Dr. Campanelli relied on dosages of calomel for the drug's antiseptic action upon what he had come to decide was a badly developed state of gastric enteritis.

Then Maxon died.

It was Jane's first experience with the death of a loved one (her mother had died at Jane's birth), and being a special sort of child she was icily moved rather than hysterically shaken. She kept her small tanned face an expressionless mask over the irreparable sadness that confounded her.

"It's like cutting off an arm or a

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leg," she said with precocious wisdom to her best friend Lily Blaine. "You can't get it back, so you have to learn to live without it."

"You're hard, Jane," Lily said admiringly. "You have a will of iron."

"So is a turtle hard. It has to be because of its soft insides."

After the bland undertaker and his pale assistant had finished fixing up papa and had put him in a coffin set on trestles in the Florida room, arranging the floral offerings from all of papa's friends around it, Jane went in and stood in solitary contemplation beside it.

Monsignor Lavigny, coming softly into the room with the gliding effect of mercury in motion, found her there. The prelate, who resembled the portraits of Cardinal Richelieu to an extraordinary degree, was a yearly snowbird from the frozen winters of the Province of Quebec. He rented a house next door to the Maxons' each season, living in modest splendor with a housekeeper, a chauffeur, a Cadillac car, and a cellar of vintage wines. Although not of the same faith, Monsignor Lavigny had stepped over both to express his neighborly sympathy and to add his prayers for the dead.

He was an old man, a good, kindly man, and the oddities of human behavior had long since ceased to astonish him. Looking at Jane, however, he did experience a vague sense of shock. The child was bending over her father's body in the coffin and doing something with her hands —just what he could not immediately see.

"What are you doing, child?" he asked with an edge of sharpness to his practiced voice.

"To remember papa by, Father. Is it a desecration?"

Monsignor Lavigny moved beside her and looked down upon Maxon's waxen face, down at ashen hands where a single camellia flower lay caught beneath folded fingers (a bloom that Maxon had favored) with a petal or two fallen loose. He looked at Jane who with exact economy was replacing a pair of nail scissors in a pocket of her lavender frock and then enclosing her souvenir-of-sentiment between the leaves of a gold heart-locket.

"No, little Jane. It is not a desecration."

"Will you bless it, please?"

Again Monsignor Lavigny felt momentarily shaken, but in the face of such pure innocence, such faith—

"Yes." And after he had done so, he murmured, "Our Mother full of grace, be with this little child."

When the cremation rites were over, Maxon's ashes were carried out to where the Gulf Stream ever sweeps onward in its warmth, and from the fantail of the Maxon Line flagship *Maxjane,* Aurelia scattered her husband's ashes down on the frothy wake.

As the floral wreaths followed (largely composed of Maxon's favorite camellias) Aurelia mused again through her mental library of toxi-

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cology . . . *arsenic remains in the body unbelievably long, and its presence may be determined several years after burial. It has even been possible to show the presence of arsenic in the ashes of cremated bodies.*

But not, Aurelia thought triumphantly, when the ashes of a cremated husband are vanished irretrievably under the Gulf Stream's sweep. How good life was! Now. She drew Jane's small, unlimber body within her arms and kissed the child's cold cheek. There would be time enough for arranging about Jane after a decorous interval—after, say, a year had elapsed.

The business of settling Maxon's estate moved on. Its bulk was left in trust to Jane with Aurelia as guardian until Jane should come of age, or if Jane should die before that date and be unwed the entire legacy would revert to Aurelia.

It was the insurance policy that brought Lily Blaine's father into the case. Will Blaine was the local investigator for Southeastern Life and as Maxon's policy was for a hundred thousand dollars (Aurelia being the beneficiary) a routine investigation was required.

"It's only a formality," Lily explained to Jane. "It's always done with large sums. Papa is doing it all the time."

Blaine's first suspicion—no, suspicion was too strong a word; doubt would be better—was aroused during what at first he considered would be a stereotyped questioning of Dr. Campanelli. Almost with a garrulous effect of self-justification, the clinical course of Maxon's illness was given to Blaine in detail, from the initial diagnosis of jaundice to the final shift to gastric enteritis. It was a clinical course, Blaine realized, that could as easily have been true in a slow poisoning by arsenic.

Blaine naturally was no fool. He was, perhaps, what might be called a brilliantly methodical investigator, and he was highly thought of by Southeastern Life. He felt intuitively that he recognized Aurelia as a type. Actually, little was known about her among the yacht club crowd—about her past, that is, which she rarely mentioned and then only in the vaguest and most general terms.

This was all right, because it was the habit of Halcyon first to be incurious and then to take a person's statements at their face value. But it was not all right now, in his specialized job, for Blaine. If there was any monkey business about motive, both the insurance and the Maxon wealth were obvious enough.

The classic Robinson poisoning case in Massachusetts began to pester Blaine's thoughts. Mrs. Robinson's technique had seemed foolproof and for a while it was, in the sense that she had killed one after another of her kinfolk by arsenic in order to collect their life insurance policies, in which she was named as beneficiary.

Mrs. Robinson's method for safely easing her victims into an insurance-

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collectible state had been to wait with loving patience until some trivial illness of her relative made it possible for her to call in a physician. After the doctor's mind was fairly established upon a diagnosis, Mrs. Robinson would give the arsenic, beginning with small doses. In this manner the transition of the patient to a serious condition would not be too sudden, until finally she shoved the poison to its fatal limit.

In all her six successes the attending doctor was satisfactorily deceived by the clinical course. Mrs. Robinson had even gone a step further in her cleverness. She had never called the same physician when a new venture was cooking. It seemed incredible, but reputable, experienced medical men, one after the other, did miss the true diagnosis and cause of death —leaving Mrs. Robinson happily free to eliminate her relatives one after the other until she was finally detected in the poisoning of her own son.

"There's a possible parallel," Blaine said to his wife Anna with whom he usually discussed his investigations, knowing from years of contented marriage that she was the unbelievable type of woman who never gossips.

"Suppose there is, Will? What's the answer? Suppose you could even prove Aurelia bought arsenic, or a compound—claiming it was needed as an insecticide—what then? Could you prove she gave it to Fred?"

"No."

"There isn't a trace, not even an ash of him left."

"But there is a lead we still have to follow," Blaine said. "Her past."

During the following week Blaine was a busy man. He utilized not only his own sources and various connections but those of Southeastern Life as well. Then he went to see Aurelia, with whom both he and Anna were (principally due to the best-friends relationship between Lily and Jane) on friendly terms.

She received him in the sun-drenched patio and Blaine's impression of her current mood was that of a courteous member of the cat family who had not only swallowed a canary but had thoroughly digested it, too. She reclined on a bamboo chaise-longue against a backdrop of palm trees, sand, and an ocean softly restless under the morning's marble sky. A widow in delicate mauve cotton and painted lips of cherry red.

"You've come to tell me that the check has gone through, Will?"

"No, Aurelia, I'm afraid not just yet."

Her smile remained Mona Lisa as she asked, "Why not?"

"I've already explained the necessity of a routine investigation."

"But isn't that over?"

"Yes."

"Well, then?"

"A few questions. I hate to be difficult about this."

"Anything, Will. I know it's your job."

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"About your two former husbands."

If Blaine had expected a reaction he was disappointed. There was none. Aurelia asked nothing about how he had found out or why he had gone to the trouble. For a galling second it almost seemed that she was on the point of laughter.

"What about them, Will?"

"It's the boys at the home office. I won't play this cute, Aurelia. They're bothered by a similarity between your former husbands' deaths and that of Fred. A general pattern."

"Pattern?"

"Both were heavily insured, with you named as beneficiary, both were cremated, and the clinical courses of their illnesses ran pretty much the same as Fred's."

"An unhappy series of coincidences. You are leading up to something specific, of course?"

"Yes. They want your permission to open the urns. I'm afraid if you won't grant it they'll insist on a court order."

"But of *course* I'll grant it. Why not?" Her smile broadened as she added, "The urns are empty."

Here we go, Blaine thought. Right down to the wire. He did not doubt that Aurelia spoke the truth, that when the urns were opened (which they would be) there would not be a solitary ash. The method of operation was lucidly plain.

"John," Aurelia was saying, "John Griswold, my first husband, wished his ashes to be scattered in the Canadian woods where he loved to hunt. My second husband was a mountain climbing enthusiast. His instructions were that his ashes should be dropped into a crevice of the Weisshorn of the Alpes Valaisannes. The urns are simply for the record, as Fred's will be."

And there it was. Racked up. Exploded in his face and in the collective faces of Southeastern Life. Knocked out of the box for good. Blaine said goodbye. He said the check for one hundred thousand dollars would come along some time next week. Yes, he thought, she really had it made.

That afternoon, as the two best friends sunbathed on the Maxon private beach, Lily Blaine said to Jane, "Papa is worried sick. There was key lime pie for dessert at lunch and he didn't even touch it."

"Is he worried about my stepmother?"

"No. About you."

"Me?"

"Yes. I overhear most of what they say, of course."

"I know you do and I think it's a disgusting habit."

"Maybe it is, but that's the way I am. I didn't catch all of it but papa thinks you may be in some sort of danger."

"From what?"

"I don't know. It's mixed up with your father's death. Something about his ashes and the Gulf Stream. One thing I did hear distinctly—he said to mama, if there were only some-

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thing left of Fred. Anything. Anything at all."

"There is," Jane said.

"Where?"

"In my gold heart-locket."

The trial of Aurelia Maxon for the poisoning of her husband began in General Sessions, Part III, Judge Bell presiding, on Thursday, March 9. It lasted for five days. In the annals of the state the case was unique. The remains of the victim, the most essential part in proving the corpus delicti or the body of evidence that indicates the crime of homicide, appeared simply not to have existed for purposes of autopsy.

The defense was represented by Harrison Stone, one of the South's most able and distinguished lawyers, and the State by Assistant State Attorney M. J. Culdoon. Stone at once asked for a directed verdict on the grounds that, under the circumstances of cremation and sinking of the ashes in the ocean, no conceivable proof could be advanced that Maxon had been poisoned.

"The State," Culdoon countered, "will introduce evidence at the proper time that arsenic in a lethal amount was present in Maxon's body at the time of his death."

The motion was denied.

Culdoon's array of witnesses for the prosecution included, among others, the pharmacist who had sold Aurelia the arsenic compound, the Maxon cook, two maids, and butler, whose composite testimony was that Aurelia had insisted on nursing her husband throughout his illness, as well as preparing special delicacies in the way of broths, custards, and jellies for him, with her own hands.

Harrison Stone barely bothered to cross-examine beyond pointing out that everything the witnesses said, instead of having given his client the opportunity to administer poison, simply emphasized her concern, her fondness, and her devotion to her husband. He conveyed to the jury an implication that surely they would sympathize with his impatient boredom over the cruel (to his client) absurdity and uselessness of the whole proceeding.

It was established by the medical examiner that the clinical course of Maxon's illness had followed the classic line of a case of slow poisoning by arsenic and admitted by him, under cross-examination by Stone, that it would equally well follow the classic line of a case of toxic jaundice and gastric enteritis. A tie.

Then Culdoon played his ace of trumps. He called Jane to the stand.

He said, after the preliminaries, "Tell me, Jane, do you recognize this gold heart-shaped locket?"

"Of course I do, Mr. Culdoon. Papa gave it to me for my last birthday."

"Do you recognize the marks put upon it in your presence when you gave it to me?"

"Yes—the initials M.J.C. and the date."

"If your Honor pleases, I would

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like the locket marked for identification."

Stone rose.

"I am at a loss to understand, your Honor, how a child's birthday present can have any bearing on the case."

Judge Bell said pleasantly, "I am sure, counselor, that the prosecuting attorney will enlighten us on the point. The locket may be identified."

"And," Culdoon said, approaching the bench, "its contents."

"Just a minute," Stone said sharply. "What about its contents?"

"With your permission, your Honor?"

Culdoon moved a blank sheet of paper to the desk's edge and opened the locket, dropping its contents on the paper.

"As you see," he said, "it contained a lock of hair. A lock of Maxon's hair. Hair, which having undergone expert laboratory tests and analyses proves beyond the shadow of a doubt that Maxon's death was caused by a lethal amount of arsenic."

Stone evidently was shaken, but he was far too experienced to be stampeded.

"I have no objection, your Honor, to the locket being admitted in evidence, but as for the hair I do object —decidedly and strongly so."

"On what grounds, Mr. Stone?"

"Primarily, sir, that there exists no basis for comparison. This evidence which Mr. Culdoon proposes to introduce is admittedly a lock of hair, and although not conceding that it might possibly be a lock of hair impregnated with arsenic, can it be proven to have been Maxon's hair? Can it now, under the circumstances of cremation, be compared with hair from Maxon's head and shown that it has the same characteristics? May I paraphrase a quote on the subject from the standard work by Gonzales, Vance, Helpern and Umberger?"

"You may."

"Their contention is that characteristics of scalp hairs cannot be used for personal identification, that hairs from the same scalp are similar to each other but no two are identical, and for the purpose of individual identification mere similarity is not sufficient."

"I am aware of the fact, counselor. Just what is your position, Mr. Culdoon?"

"This, your Honor. My witness will testify that she snipped the hair from her father while he lay in his coffin and then enclosed it in the locket as a souvenir of sentiment."

"Scarcely legal proof," Stone said, smiling with careful kindness over at Jane. "It would still remain the uncorroborated testimony of a child."

"I'm inclined to agree," Judge Bell said. "Unless you do have positive corroboration, Mr. Culdoon?"

"If the witness may step down? Direct examination later to be continued?"

"Granted."

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"I will now," Culdoon said after Jane had returned to her seat, "call Monsignor Hubert Duval Lavigny to the stand."

"Naturally," Blaine told his wife that evening after supper, "it nailed Stone right on the button. So far as he and Aurelia were concerned, the outcome of the trial spelled curtains. Stone did, of course, try to bull it through with a lot of fancy legal figure skating but it was no use. No jury on earth would ever question the word of a Monsignor of the Church."

"Do you know what pleases me most about the verdict, Will?"

"What?"

"The fact that from now on—and I thank God for it—little Jane is safe."

If you enjoy ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE, you will enjoy some of the other Mercury Publications:

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THE DRAMATIC DEATHS OF DR. KANG

DEATH IN CHINA

by VICTOR CANNING

LATE ON A SNOWY AFTERNOON IN THE winter of 1910, a young Chinese made his way briskly along the Street of Happy Tailors. At the age of twenty-five, Lin Kang—doctor of philosophy at Peking University—had a portliness and assured bearing which would have suited a much older man. Dr. Kang had other aspects, too, which scholarly persons of twenty-odd usually acquire only later in life. His plump face carried a placid smile and his confident, yet unassuming carriage, gave him the air of a young Buddha wrapped in the grave delights of meditation.

Actually he was thinking about three things—money, an embroidered padded coat, and the offer of a partnership in an illicit opium business trading with Australia and Russia. The money, which he carried in the sleeve pocket of his shabby gown, he had won that afternoon gambling with six other recently elected doctors of philosophy at the University. The game had taken place in a rather dark room. Dr. Kang had been pleased with the gloom. He had been able to encourage his luck with an occasional sleight-of-hand. The embroidered coat was fifty yards ahead of him in the shop of the Ho-Min brothers. Dr. Kang could not remember whether it was the wonderful colors of the coat or the young sister of the Ho-Min brothers that had first attracted his attention. So far only the coat had eluded his possession.

He turned out of the snowstorm into the shop and found the sister of the Ho-Min brothers there. Little-Bird-That-Takes-Food-From-the-Lips had steel-blue hair like the shadows cast by pine trees on snow, the grace of a bending rush, a bold look in her eyes, and a giggle which a man soon tired of. These were Dr. Kang's own observations.

She came to him from the shadows, saluted him, and said, "It is three months since we walked by the lakeside and had great happiness. Now my heart lives again to see you."

"It is good to be happy when young," said Dr. Kang. "Your brothers still have the padded coat with the white egrets that fly above the red and green dragons?"

"They have, Lin Kang."

"It is odd how two such ill-favored men could have created so much beauty. I wish to buy it."

"There is no need," said Little

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Bird. "My heart tells me that you are a man of honor and it shall be their gift."

"Why should they make me gifts? It is known that they sell even the thread-ends from the floor to stuff cushions."

"When a sister is married, Lin Kang, the brothers honor the bridegroom." She came closer to him and the look in her eyes was bold and calculating.

"Married?"

"Should it not be so?"

Dr. Kang's gentle smile was unaltered. But in his heart he was condemning the impetuosity of his young years. Little Bird had shared her happiness beside the lake with many others—but when it came to marriage she was picking him.

"There is need for marriage between us?"

"He who picks the flowers must provide the vase." Her lips tightened and Dr. Kang realized the determination within her.

"And if I refuse, Little Bird?"

"Why should you, Lin Kang? If my brothers should learn that their sister is no longer a maiden, their loss of honor would call for your death—unless we are to be married."

"You reason well, Little Bird. Tomorrow I shall come again and we will make the announcement to your brothers."

But inwardly Dr. Kang was thinking that at midnight he was going to Canton and that there would be no grief in his heart at never coming back. He had no intention of sharing a trap with any Little Bird when the whole world waited for him.

Little Bird said, "I am happy. Now I go to see my sister. She also is married." She bowed to him, smiling triumphantly, and moved out into the street. Dr. Kang watched her go and shook his head gravely.

As he stood there a door at the back of the shop banged. Footsteps clattered through the back room. Into the shop came the elder Ho-Min brother, a tall man whose lean face was vellum stretched tight over the bones. He came up to Dr. Kang, beating his hands together.

"Dr. Kang, the cold is enough to crack a pot. I have come from the house of the French ambassador where his wife has bought silks from me."

"I bargain better than any Frenchwoman. Also I am your friend," said Dr. Kang. "I have set my heart on the coat of the white egrets for tonight I go to Canton and need to be warmly dressed."

"You stay long in Canton?"

"I cannot tell. But wherever I go your coat will do me honor."

For the next ten minutes they bargained. Once or twice during their skirmishing, Dr. Kang handled the coat, pointing out imaginery faults in the stitching, or calling attention to a shade of color that not quite matched. He also reflected that so fine a coat, with Little Bird thrown in and the dowry her brothers would have to give, might have tempted

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some men. But then most men had mud in their veins. Let me be always, he thought, the hawk that dines among the pheasants.

When he left the shop the snow was still falling. He carried the new coat, wrapped carefully, under his arm. On his way to his lodgings he called at the offices of the Tei-Wei Company and arranged with Mr. Tei-Wei—by whom he had been offered the partnership in the opium trade—to leave on the midnight train for Canton.

Dr. Kang had no regrets at leaving Peking. His parents had almost ruined themselves to send him to the University, but nothing could take away their happiness in knowing that, no matter what finally happened to their son, he had once been a Doctor of Philosophy. And Dr. Kang, being now a qualified lover of wisdom, felt that the time had come to employ his knowledge to promote his own wealth and happiness.

Dr. Kang spent his last evening at the Teahouse-of-the-Student-Who-Had-Failed-for-the-Fifth-Time. In the grounds of an old palace not far from the University it was much favored by the younger lecturers and doctors. There was a large room where one could discuss philosophy, culture, one's own ego, or just gamble while music played quietly in the background. There were also other rooms where one could smoke a quiet pipe of opium.

Dr. Kang, who was sociable, stayed in the large room. Also he was wearing his new coat and wished to show it off. Which he did with a modesty that deceived no one. And it was here, towards the end of the evening, that Doctor Sverdla came. Plump, squat, Sverdla was also a doctor of philosophy, but he was no lover of Dr. Kang. Sverdla, who was half-Russian, knew when dice were being rigged and had been furious when he could not detect how it was done and so denied the right to expose the cheat. He had lost two months' pay to Dr. Kang that afternoon. He was also a little drunk and more forthright than courtesy demanded.

He came and stood over Dr. Kang and, scowling, said, "It is a beautiful coat. But a coat does not make the man."

"Your meaning is clear," said Dr. Kang, unruffled and beaming. "True beauty and grace lie within a man."

"And true courage. A quick hand makes a man bold to gamble high. I am in the mood for a game of wits."

"How shall we gamble then?" asked Dr. Kang and his blandness was like honey. He bowed gently to acknowledge the murmurs from the people around at his extreme courtesy in the face of anger.

"With our brains—and the stake shall be your new coat against this diamond ring I wear. I shall begin five quotations from the great Sage and you must complete them all—otherwise I take your beloved coat."

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Dr. Kang bowed. Confucius's sayings had been in the air he had breathed for fifteen years. "Begin," he said gently.

Sverdla, his face angry, said, "'What the superior man seeks is in himself—'"

"'What the small man seeks is in others,'" finished Dr. Kang.

"'Learning,'" said Sverdla, "'undigested by thought is labor lost—'"

"'Thought unassisted by learning is perilous,'" completed Dr. Kang, and ignored the approval of the crowd which had gathered.

Twice more Sverdla questioned him and each time Dr. Kang filled out the master's words. Then Sverdla was silent in thought for a while. Finally he said, "'No intelligent ruler arises to take me as his master—'."

Dr. Kang hesitated. Sverdla's face was triumphant and the crowd around them waited. Dr. Kang bowed his head and shrugged sadly.

"I do not know. Tell me."

"Go back to your studies," said Sverdla, "and discover the ending for yourself."

Half an hour later Dr. Sverdla left the teahouse wearing the beautiful padded coat of the white egrets. Two days later an unrecognizable body, still wearing the embroidered coat, was fished from the new canal being dug outside the city. And away in Canton, Dr. Kang had taken up his new duties in the opium trade. A man, he told himself, should know when to be wise. As he had left the shop that afternoon, he had noticed that Ho-Min, who seemingly had come in out of a snowstorm, wore sandals untouched by snow. So Ho-Min had been in the inner room all the time and must have heard him talking to Little Bird—and knew that he meant to go to Canton and leave her. And Ho-Min and his brother knew also where he spent his evenings. Surely they would wait for the white egret coat to come out and they would strike from the shadows without looking at the face.

Also, thought Dr. Kang, a man should know when to appear foolish. Poor Sverdla—Dr. Kang finished the quotation for him: "'My time has come to die'."

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THE SECOND DRAMATIC DEATH OF DR. KANG

DEATH IN AUSTRALIA

by VICTOR CANNING

As he rowed gently out to the lugger *Marion* in response to a call for his medical services, Dr. Kang was in a mildly reflective mood. Across the blue waters of the inlet the crumbling shacks of Willistown, with the high, bare Queensland mountains rising behind them, shimmered in the late afternoon heat. There was nothing in the view which pleased him. Nothing to please his mind or to satisfy the deep, ambitious spirit which, ever since he had left Peking University ten years before, had kept Dr. Kang moving and searching. He had had his ups and downs, and Willistown was the bottom of a pit.

The boat bumped against the side of the *Marion*. One of the crew leaned over and helped Dr. Kang come aboard. Plump and beaming, shabby in his worn linen suit, Dr. Kang went down to the cabin. Max Riller, the captain, lay on a bunk, smoking. Long, lean, and with the face of a sulky baboon, he was a man who raised a certain amount of envy in Dr. Kang at this moment. In the lugger *Marion*, Riller worked the Australian Coral Sea coast—illegal pearl fishing, smuggling, piracy—more than one trading schooner had disappeared through Riller's activities, leaving him the richer by its cargo. A man of varied parts, thought Dr. Kang, and he wondered what would be found in the little safe fastened to the bulkhead above Riller's head.

"One of my boys is sick, Doc. Have a look at him."

Dr. Kang went aft and looked at the man. He was Japanese and, although Kang's doctorate—unknown to Willistown—was in philosophy, he knew malaria when he saw it. He also knew an opportunity when it knocked. Straightening up from the patient, he told himself that a man does not have to be a baker to take a cake from an oven.

He went back to Riller and the gentle, Buddha-like smile was gone from Dr. Kang's round face.

"You have trouble aboard, Captain," he said. "Your boy has typhus."

"What!" Riller sat up sharply. "But that's contagious."

Dr. Kang nodded. "Do not worry. I have some vaccine ashore. The rest of you can be inoculated and the boat must be quarantined until the danger is past. The boy, of course, may die—"

"To hell with the boy! Is this vaccine stuff going to do the trick for the rest of us?"

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"It will. Do not worry," said Dr. Kang, and then with a smile he added, "Worry is a bad medicine. I'll be back in an hour."

For the next hour Dr. Kang was a busy man. Anyone who stole from Riller would need to have a good start before the man discovered his loss. Brisbane was six days down the coast, and the only car in Willistown was an old Ford owned by Hans, the storekeeper. Dr. Kang went to see Lara, Hans's wife.

Lara was Eurasian and bored and restless in Willistown. In the past she had often looked at Dr. Kang in a way which suggested that they might find some mutual cure for her boredom. Dark, sultry, and slatternly, she was quick to accept Dr. Kang's proposition that a half share in the profits was a generous return for stealing a car key from her husband and going with Dr. Kang to Brisbane. In Brisbane, Dr. Kang told himself, since one hand in a purse was enough, he would find some way of depriving her of her share. But for the moment the car was the important thing. If they had it Riller couldn't follow them in it.

From Lara, Dr. Kang went back to his shack and collected his vaccines. Rowing out to the lugger, he eyed Willistown with the affection of a man who knows he is soon to leave. Riller himself helped him aboard.

"You're sure this stuff is going to work, Doc?"

"If it does not," said Dr. Kang blandly, "you will be in no position to complain."

"That's one joke I don't like. However, let's get it over."

Including the sick man there was a crew of five aboard the *Marion*. Dr. Kang used his syringe on them all. It was a blessing, he thought, that having to supplement his earnings by doing a little veterinary work among the sheep stations around Willistown, he had bought himself a supply of nembutal. In half an hour the crew of the *Marion* would be unconscious and would stay that way for many hours.

He rowed back to Willistown and went up to the store. Lara's husband, Hans, was playing cards with three of the sheephands and they called Dr. Kang over to join them. Lara brought them some drinks. For a moment Dr. Kang caught her eye. She was a fine woman, he thought, but she really should wash more. His fastidious nature was shocked by the vulgarity of one of the sheephands who, happy with drink, pinched her as she leaned over the table to serve the drinks. Lara smacked the man's head and Hans roared with laughter.

It had been dark an hour when Dr. Kang rowed back to the *Marion*. The sick man was unconscious in his bunk. One of the crew had passed out on deck, and the cook was slumped in a chair in the galley. Riller lay on his bunk and his mate was on the floor.

Dr. Kang found the key of the

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safe on a thong around Riller's neck. In the safe was a tin box with a collection of pearls that made Dr. Kang purse his lips with pleasure. Also there were two thousand dollars in American money and a small packet of opium. He took the lot and, before he left, put the lugger's engine out of order.

He went back to his shack and sat there for a long time. It would be near midnight before Hans would be drunk enough for Lara to get the car key safely from him.

The car was kept in a hut at the back of the store, and half an hour before midnight Dr. Kang was waiting in the shadows beside it. From the store came the sound of men's voices and laughter, and from the far side of the hut the occasional stamp and fidget of some of the sheephands' horses tethered there.

A shadow slipped round the side of the store and Lara was at Dr. Kang's side. She put her hand on his arm and he saw the excited shine of her eyes as a wave of cheap perfume enveloped him.

"Everything is all right?" she asked.

"Happiness lies before us," said Dr. Kang and he patted his pocket. "You have the key?"

"Yes."

Dr. Kang pulled open the doors of the hut. As he turned back to let Lara go through, a tall shadow broke away from the side of the hut. An arm went up and something hit Dr. Kang on the top of the head. In the few seconds before he crumpled to the floor and lost consciousness, Dr. Kang recognized the face of the sheephand who had pinched Lara, and his last thought was that the loyalty of a woman like Lara was bought in only one way.

An hour later, when Dr. Kang came to, he found his pockets empty. He picked himself up and, still somewhat dazed, went into the store. The place was empty except for Hans who sat at a table by himself, staring at his glass. The man looked up and grinned drunkenly.

"Hullo, Doc. You're out late."

Dr. Kang got himself a glass and helped himself to a drink. He had to get out of Willistown. There was no doubt of that. In a very short time Riller would be moving. With any luck the horse of the sheephand who had gone off with Lara would still be tethered at the back. He would take that and disappear. If he was disappointed he didn't show it. Sour grapes, he told himself, make a poor wine.

Hans drained his glass and then, looking at Dr. Kang, began to chuckle gently. "You know, Doc, I got to apologize to you. For a long time I thought you was going to be the one."

"I do not understand, Hans."

"I thought you was after Lara. She ain't really my wife, you know. Now that she's gone I don't mind who knows it. But I thought you was the one she had her eye on.

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Seems I was wrong. It was that long streak from the Kelly station. She flipped off with him tonight. Stupid creatures, women, Doc. Very stupid . . . they think you don't notice anything."

"And what did you notice, Hans?"

"Washing," said Hans. "Took a bath this evening, she did! A real bath! Ain't seen her do that in months. So, I says—if she won't do that for me, the dirty slut, she must be doing it for someone else. And loving, too. All over me the early part of the evening. Arms round me neck, and so on, right in front of everyone."

"A wife has a right to show her affection."

"Sure. But she wanted the car key. Bathing herself, putting on more scent—not for me, it wasn't."

"You seem to take it very philosophically."

"That's what it seems, Doc. But things ain't always what they seem. You pretending to be a real doctor, for instance. I know you ain't. And I don't let no loud-mouthed sheephand walk off with my woman, either." He laughed.

"But they've gone, Hans."

"Sure. But they won't get no further than that old wooden bridge over the gully just outside town. It's a crazy old bridge, you know. Being the first sort of citizen here, I've been really worried about it for a long time. Real worried. I went and had a look at it just after she pinched my key."

"I admire your public spirit," said Dr. Kang, standing up. "Maybe you took a saw with you, or something like that, in the hope that you could repair it?"

"Something like that, Doc. You catch on fast."

"When accidents happen a doctor's presence never comes amiss." Dr. Kang walked towards the door.

"No matter how fast you get there, Doc, you won't be able to help. It's over a hundred foot drop. Luckily the car's insured. Leave it till morning—"

But Dr. Kang didn't leave it until the morning. He left Hans with his bottle and rode out of town on the sheephand's horse.

The sawn bridge supports had collapsed and the car was at the bottom of the ravine. There was nothing he could do for either of them. They were quite dead. From the pockets of the sheephand, who had died instead of him, Dr. Kang recovered the haul from the *Marion*.

He rode on, away from Willistown, telling himself that a man's luck was like a mill wheel, always turning.

(Watch for more "deaths" of Dr. Kang in future issues)

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **AVRAM DAVIDSON**

TITLE: ***The French Key***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: Santa Una, California

COMMENTS: *A decidedly offbeat story: the satirical exposé of the sordid and seamy life inside a fourth-rate hotel. You will be reminded of the late Nathanael West's novels, and you will discover, with a sort of wriggling uneasiness, that one sure meets all kinds of people in the hotel business . . .*

FOR A LONG TIME THE GREAT American Theme was the struggle of The Man Who Slew Savages and Cleared the Wilderness. Then, abruptly, there were no more Savages (although Geronimo, a shriveled, mean, little man, could now and then be put on display at one of the Army posts where he lived out his days, half prisoner, half pensioner) and the lumber companies took over the wilderness. Then The Great American Theme became that of Rags to Riches, which gradually changed to Making a Million. This still has its devotees, but they now write in the past: rags are rarer these days and the Federal Income Tax has also made it mighty hard to make a million, and harder to keep it.

The Great Theme nowadays is Getting the Promotion. You see it everywhere, it has become as stylized as the horse opera; it's in the magazines and the movies and on TV, and in novel after novel. Mr. Wendel Forest, the manager of the Hotel Pacifica, lived for promotion as Galahad lived for the Holy Grail. It was not a literary theme for him, it was the reason for his existence. He had gone as far as he could go in the Pacifica, but that hotel was owned by the Estate of Wilmer Peabody, which owned a few other hotels, some smaller and some larger. Among the larger ones was the Hotel Del Sur, and its pastel-stucco walls glittered for Wendel Forest like the walls of the Holy City had for

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the Crusaders. *There* he would have a staff of six under him; *here* he had only Emma the maid and Old Fred the night clerk. *There* the manager had a two-room suite and a television set and private shower; *here* he had one room and kitchenette, a tiny radio, and the choice of the public shower or a bathtub in any vacant unit. *There* the manager got two-and-a-half times the salary as *here*. And the Hotel Del Sur was not the end, not by any means, for the Estate of Wilmer Peabody also owned the Alta Costa (with its cabanas and two swimming pools) and the Frémont (which had all that and a ballroom, too).

With luck and skill there was no reason why Wendel Forest shouldn't scale those heights and even go on from there. The Estate of Wilmer Peabody, after all, did not represent the ultimate in hotels. There were other names—Statler, for example . . . Hilton . . . Mr. Wendel Forest had great hopes.

There are many things which it is useful for the manager of a small hotel to know: minor repairs to electrical devices and plumbing, a smattering of the more common foreign languages, the care and handling of troublesome drunks. . . . The list can run on for pages, but the first thing every hotel manager had to learn, and learn fast—if he's to keep his job and expect Promotion—is the proper use of "The French Key." The French key was Mr. Forest's sword, his axe, his alpenstock. By knowing when to use it and when not (but most often, at the Pacifica, *when*), he hoped quite soon to be Manager of the Del Sur, and away at last from the dingy Pacifica.

One morning Emma, the gray-haired chambermaid, came clattering down the hall in a tizzy to tell Mr. Wendel Forest that all was not well in Room 11. The guest had gone out, leaving in his room the following departures from the norm:

All window shades torn down.

A blanket nailed across one window.

The mattress lying on the floor and chocolate syrup all over the mattress.

The Sunday newspaper carefully shredded to the dimensions of spaghetti and evenly distributed on the rug.

"Is his baggage still here, Emma?" was Forest's first question. It was. "Ah, well," said Forest, philosophically. It *was* a mess, but the remedy was at hand. He drew from his pocket a little device several inches long and made of metal, put it in the lock of Room 11, turned it till it clicked. Part of the little metal gadget came off with a tug, leaving the lock securely plugged. The "key" proper went back to the manager's pocket. No other key could now open that door, certainly not the guest's own key. When the guest had paid for the damage done to the room, France's gift to the hotel industry would return him access to his baggage. Not before.

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"There!" said Mr. Forest, realizing that it could have been worse.

Twenty-five years earlier murder had been committed in the Pacifica, and the manslayer had jumped from the second-story window, scaled a fence, and disappeared from sight as if swallowed by the earth.

The French key had been of no use *then*.

When Mr. Forest first took up employment in the Pacifica he had hung in his office a framed poem declaring the poet's (and Mr. Forest's) desire to Live in a House by the Side of the Road and Be a Friend to Man. Before the week was out he had extended credit to the amount of $23.75 to three well-dressed young men, a well-dressed old man, and a middle-aged woman with a child, not one of whom ever returned to pay the score. The $23.75 eventually came out of Mr. Forest's pocket, the agent for the Estate of Wilmer Peabody spoke to him (as he said) Like a Dutch Uncle, the poem came down from the wall, and Mr. Forest thereafter diligently learned and practised the unhesitating use of the French key.

Emma now surveyed the plugged keyhole. "Well, my goodness!" she said. "What a mess! Now I seen everything." And she went back to her vacuum cleaner and Forest went back to his office. In the hotel business odd things are taken in stride. The *one* thing, however, which is *never* taken in stride is letting the delinquent guest Get Away With It.

In his "office"—a tiny cubbyhole (quite different from the one at the Hotel Del Sur)—Forest looked over the register and receipt book and began making up his lists: a vacancy list and a list of "Due" tenants. For a while—say, from six to three months ago—this had been rather a sad chore because he would come to the name of Janey Macdonald. He *still* came to her name, but he no longer felt sad about it. The fact is—or, was—that Wendel Forest, who should have known better, had for a while entertained a tenant socially. He and Janey had gone out together. She was pleasant, intelligent, not bad-looking, about his own age, and she appreciated the attentions of a steady, sober gentleman with a future because she'd had a tough time of it with her husband.

Janey was lonely and Forest was, too. Oh, yes, he saw people all day long, but it wasn't the same thing. So he and Janey had gone swimming on Sundays—he had paid Old Fred out of his own money to stand by on Sunday afternoon, always a slack time at the hotel—and they had gone out to a movie in the evenings, or sometimes they just had a long, slow supper together at some little restaurant and just talked. Macdonald had given her a hard time, there was no doubt about that. He was a drinker, and he'd insist that she drink with him, then he'd turn ugly on her. But when he died Janey had given up drinking. It seemed that she was the woman for Forest, all

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right, and he'd thought he might do a lot worse than ask her to marry him. On his salary at the Pacifica he couldn't support a wife, but he'd planned to put an ad in the trade paper and try to get a job for a couple to manage a motel or something of that sort.

"How'd you like that?" he had asked.

Her eyes had glowed. "Love it," she said.

But then a few things happened. First, the agent for the Estate told him that Victor Wilson, who was managing the Del Sur, kept on talking about retiring.

"You're next in line," the agent said. "Just keep your nose clean here, show what you can do, and I think I can get Them to agree."

"Them" referred to the remnants of the Peabody family—a spinster daughter, a niece and her husband.

And so Forest had tried to picture Janey at the Del Sur—at the Alta Costa—at the Frémont—and he found that he couldn't. She just didn't fit in. The positions called for someone who was smoother, who had more poise, more polish, someone who spoke better English. Janey just wasn't the type. At the moment, to be sure, Forest didn't know anyone who was, but with the promotion in view he could afford to wait. Maybe he might meet someone at the Del Sur. Or the Alta Costa. Or the Frémont. He could afford to wait.

Then Janey had confessed to him. Macdonald wasn't dead, after all. They had been divorced. "I don't know why I said he was dead," she had said, miserably, after Forest had failed to reply that it didn't matter (as she obviously expected he would). "It just popped out, then I was afraid to tell you, then I figured there was no hurry." He just sat there, saying nothing, staring at his plate.

"Look, Wendel," she had continued desperately, putting her hand on his. He did not take it. "I've had such a rotten life. Meeting you's the first decent thing ever happened to me. My father was a lush, then I married another." And she went on and on. But it was no use. After all, she *had* deceived him. Of course, he neglected to tell her about his own unhappy marriage to Vivian and their divorce, but that was a long time ago, he'd been just a kid, and besides, it was different in a man's case. A man wasn't expected to tell a woman everything.

But, still, it did leave a sort of gap in his life. Every morning he'd had to write her name down on his list and for about three months it made him a little bit sad. By that time he had Adjusted. But Janey didn't Adjust quite so well.

"Do you think I'd better move out?" she had asked. At first his reaction was: Good . . . best thing. Then came a quick second thought: No. Business was slack. Too many vacancies. Wouldn't look good on his record. The agent would want

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to know why such a long-standing tenant had moved. Janey's money was as good as anyone else's.

"No, don't do that, Janey—Mrs. Macdonald," he had said. "There's no reason we can't still be friends." Her face, which had winced at "Mrs. Macdonald," cheered up. It was such corn—but women seemed to lap up corn—she'd still keep hoping. But, as time went on, hope had ebbed. She began to let go. Clothes less neat. Beer on her breath. Hair out of place. So on . . . It only showed that Forest had been right about her all the time.

So now he just sighed very briefly as he made up his room-check.

Room 15. Mr. Machado
Room 16. Hobart Brothers
Room 17. Mrs. Macdonald
Room 18. Vacant

His room-check complete, he drew up the Vacancy List. Seven empties—not good, with the possibility of their remaining empty until the agent called, as he did several times daily, to check. Next, Forest drew up the Rentals Due List.

Room 1. Eddie Shoemaker
Room 5. Mr. Isotti
Room 17. Mrs. Macdonald

He stared at what he'd just written. Something about it seemed not right. Then he remembered, and he swore silently at himself for having forgotten. *Janey hadn't paid last week, either*. He had broken two rules: Never extend credit and never put up the money yourself. How could he have been so stupid!

"Something's come up, Wendel—Mr. Forest, I mean. I just can't pay it today. But I'll have the money Sunday, believe me." She had seemed upset, tense. Well, he hadn't wanted a scene. So, like a fool, he had marked the account *Paid* and put his own money in the till. Of course, he'd kept the receipt, but a lot of good that did. Pay him Sunday? Here it was Wednesday, and the next week already due! She was abusing his friendship, she was making a sucker out of him.

Forest didn't hesitate more than a moment. He locked the office and walked rapidly to Room 17. He knocked. He waited. He called, "Mrs. Macdonald?" He waited. Then he went into her room. Everything was there—clothes, scuffed baggage, the picture of her father in his A.E.F. clothes ("I know he was no good, Wendel," she'd said, "but that picture is all the family I got."), the big rag doll, the set of colored dishes he'd helped her pick out. Something else. *His* picture—well, *their's*—a sidewalk photographer had snapped it, and Forest had waved away the card, but Janey had taken it; and here was the snapshot, stuck into her mirror. He was annoyed. She had no right to it any more. And where anyone could see it—he went cold and hot as he realized that Emma saw it every day, had perhaps told half the tenants. Then his eye picked out something else—a blue slip of paper sticking out of a small brown envelope

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marked Elsworth-Griffin Corporation. Janey worked for them. He looked up, went to the door, closed it, returned, and took up the blue slip.

This will serve as final notice that your employment with the Elsworth-Griffin Corporation terminates as of today.

It was stamped March 12. Forest breathed heavily. March 12—over three weeks ago. No wonder she hadn't had her rent ready last week. Probably she'd turned up for work half crocked and slipshod. Well, Elsworth-Griffin had the right idea. She hadn't taken *them* for a ride the way she did Wendel Forest.

He marched out of the room, closed the door. He took the French key from his pocket and effectively sealed the lock. She could have her things back when she paid him; till then—as soon as he spoke to her and was quite sure she didn't have the money—the stuff would be moved into the storage closet.

Back in his office Forest neatly laid out in a row the keys to the vacant rooms, each key with a large leather tag declaring that "Postage Is Guaranteed by The Hotel Pacifica, 1321 Alvarez Boulevard, Santa Una, Calif." A 50¢ deposit on each key usually guaranteed its return, but now and then a tenant would walk off with one, and sometimes it turned up in the mails with a postage-due sticker on it. Footsteps sounded in the hall, a man's, and Forest looked out to see if it was by chance the guest who had turned Room 11 into a surrealist exhibition: he felt some mild curiosity as to the man's motives.

But it was a flashily dressed fellow Forest had never seen before, lugging a brand-new leather bag stamped (the manager's sharp eyes noted) R.G.G. The man smirked, and asked loudly, "Gotta room with a shower, Jerry?"

"Certainly," Forest said instantly—and untruthfully. "Let me show you a few." He reached for the keys with one hand, prepared to lock the office with the other.

"How much is it?"

This was almost Classified Information. The manager of a hotel like the Pacifica *never* volunteers the price of the room before it has been shown, lest the prospective guest then and there decide it's too much, and turn tail; but once he's seen the bed and realizes how tired he is, he may stay despite the price.

"Two-fifty," said Forest. The man checked his movement to leave.

"Okay. I'll take it. You don't mind silver dollars, do ya? I been in Vegas. Cleaned up. Gotta *lotta* celebratin' to do. *Really* gonna hit that bottle!"

Forest felt a twinge, an instinctive warning, but—seven vacancies. With seven vacancies he could risk a drunk, provided the man wasn't too big. This one wasn't. In fact, Forest felt he could easily risk the man's annoyance on finding that his bath-

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room had a tub and that the only shower in the hotel was the public one for rooms without bath. "I'm sorry, I didn't understand"—any further clamor would be stilled by pointing to the fine print on the receipt:

Absolutely no refunds will be given in any circumstances except to servicemen under military orders.

The man picked up the pen and turned the register around. He hesitated a moment, smirked again, and wrote with a flourish. Forest knew, even before the pen touched paper, that the name would not begin with the initials *R.G.G.*—nor did it.

"Thank you, Mr. Smith," Forest said. Mr. Smith leaned over, and, with his third and widest smirk, spoke with his lips close to Forest's ear. The manager gave a brief man-to-man chuckle. Ordinarily he might have answered, "This is a respectable hotel!" and broken the rule against refunds, but—seven vacancies! "Well, I'm afraid that's not a part of my regular duties," he said, and smiled thinly.

Mr. Smith swaggered as he picked up his bag. "Well, I guess I can take care of that myself. I ain't done too bad in the past. Room 18? Okay, Jerry."

No sooner had Forest sat down to add Mr. Smith's name to his list than he heard a woman's step, moving slowly and irregularly; and he knew it was Janey. He put his hands flat on his desk and prepared to rise and confront her, insist on the money he'd laid out and on the new rent due—but he found he didn't rise after all. He just sat there, with his head lowered, as the hesitant, unsteady feet went by. You can't do this, one of those damnable silent voices which sometimes plague even the most sensible of men cried out inside him; you can't do this to her—you loved her, she trusted you, you can't just throw her out as if she were a—a tramp!

But Forest didn't want to listen and he pushed these thoughts away from him, tried to think of something else, thought about the man who'd just gone off to Room 18, rather than face the fact that Janey would be back almost at once with heartbreak on her face . . . Mr. Smith, as he called himself, seemed to have funds, but just in case he should turn out to be one of those who wait for money orders which never come . . . the sort who vanish at check-out time and later creep softly past the desk . . . the sort which give Mine Host the heartburn, sleepless nights, ulcers—if he lets them—why, there was always the French key.

The French key . . . like the one in Janey's door. His mind kept coming back to that. Why hadn't she returned by now? Afraid to wait and afraid not to, Forest got up and went to the back corridor, where he met Emma.

"Have you seen Mrs. Macdonald?" he asked, in a low voice. Emma nodded vigorously. Sometimes she

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would leave a can of cleanser sitting right in the middle of a rug, but this did not prevent her from having perfect recall at other times.

"She come along just a few minutes back, Mr. Forest, and she says, Oh, hello, Emma, she says, I gotta couple a big bottles a cold beer here, you wanna help me finish 'em? And I says, Well, not till I get done with my work but thanks anyway, Miz Macdonald. While I was talking to her she kep' trying to put her key in the lock, then she says kinda like to herself, Oh, I see. Then this man in Number 18 he stuck his head out and he says, Having trouble? She says, I can't get in my room, and she laughs kinda funny. Well, he says, then come in mine. I see you got beer, he says, and I got whiskey, so we'll have boilermakers, he says. And she laughs and goes in."

Forest nodded. Treat her like a tramp? the silent voice had accused. She *was,* wasn't she? This proved it.

"Then she says a kinda funny thing, Mr. Forest, about *you.*"

"Oh?"

"Uh-huh. This man in Number 18 he says, What kind of fellow is this desk clerk?" *Desk clerk!* Forest shuddered. Then he relaxed. At the Del Sur he wouldn't be put in such an embarrassing position. "And she give that same funny laugh, and she says, Oh *him?* Well, I'll tell you, she said, someone, sometime, put a French key in his heart and left it there . . . Ain't that a funny thing to say?

The afternoon wore on with lulls and lurches.

An airman on leave, note from the U.S.O.—special price.

Police, checking the register for a name three months back—not there.

An out-of-town businessman, a regular, in for three days every two weeks—two days of buying, one day on the town.

Two city-struck boys, just off the bus—one room, no bath.

Only two more rooms to go. This wasn't at all bad for the time of day. Forest sat down and had his coffee. The other rooms might go soon. Someone might even pay for a week. But you never could tell. There might be trouble. If rooms remained vacant, the agent would turn cold, would want to know How Come? Wasn't Forest trying hard enough? Did he think the Pacifica could pay his salary if it was running in the red? And even vacancies didn't bother him so much as rents unpaid.

"What do you mean, 'he's good for it, he always pays'?" the agent would demand. "Either he pays on time or he doesn't get into his room. Ever see one of these?"—waving the little metal device—"Know how to use it? Well, okay, then, *use* it!"

Well, Forest hadn't waited too long in Janey's case. She liked that two-bit cardsharp in Room 18? All right, maybe the guy would like *her* well enough to pay up the money she owed. Because the agent was right: a good guest was good only so long

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as his (or her) rent was paid. Did the guest care what fix the manager was put in? Not on your life—all he (or she) wanted was a few nights of free rent, and the devil with the manager and his promotion.

His coffee finished, Forest looked up. There was the man at the window. Mr.—how had he signed himself?—R. S. Turberfield. Face set, but eyes not meeting Forest's. Mr. Turberfield, of Room 11—the room in shambles.

Forest rose and went to the window. He said nothing.

"Can't get into my room," Mr. Turberfield said, at last, grudgingly.

"No, I guess not," Forest said, calmly, tasting Power. It tasted good.

Turberfield breathed heavily, pushed his upper lip toward his nose. "Well . . . I was sick," he said, after a moment. Then, in a rush, "Can't get any ventilation, the windows you got here!"

Forest asked, politely, if that was why he tore the shades down? Number 11 firmly denied having done any such thing. They *fell* down, he insisted, when he tried to adjust them. And he put up the blanket because he wanted privacy. He was vague about the shredded newspaper. Newspapers printed lies, was all he said. And the mattress on the floor? The air was better there.

And the chocolate syrup?

Mr. Turberfield turned an ugly red. He doubled up his fist, thrust it under Forest's nose.

"Don't you say that!" he cried. "It wasn't anything of the kind! *It was blackstrap molasses!*"

You sure meet all kinds in the hotel business . . .

But Mr. Turberfield paid the damages all right. Had to. Wanted his luggage and his clothes and things. Couldn't get them as long as the French key was plugged in his door . . .

Then Forest heard two sets of footsteps. The agent for the estate. And another man who, after the agent passed into the office, opened a leather folder and showed a police card and badge. Twice in one day. Not usual, even for the Pacifica.

"You have an R. G. Gordon registered here?" he asked. "Robert George Gordon?" and he described Mr. Smith.

Forest hesitated. Better to avoid a possible scandal. After all, it was none of his business. So he shook his head.

"Mind if I look at the register?" said the plainclothes man.

Forest slid it over to him and then turned to the agent.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Snyder." The agent nodded, started to open the receipt book.

It happened then.

There was a scream which broke off abruptly. *Janey!* And a second scream—Emma's—which went on and on.

The detective started off on the run, the agent followed, then turned to Forest, who was at his heels. "Lock the office!" he cried. Forest

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did, then ran back to the rear.

It was like a scene from an old silent film. Emma was standing, back to the wall, watching the detective struggle with "Mr. Smith." There was not even the sound of scuffling. Almost at once the man was subdued and handcuffed. They crowded into his room, and then the silence broke.

"Listen, I didn't mean to clobber her—she tried to steal my money," babbled "Smith."

"Ooh, you liar!" Emma cried, weeping. "Ooh, what a lie! I heard! You says, Come on, come on! and she says, No! And you said a dirty word and you *hit* her, I *heard* you hit her!"

Then everything happened fast. Janey was dead. There was a Las Vegas warrant out for "Smith," whose real initials were large and plain on his bag. The detective was very unpleasant about Forest's not having admitted knowing the man was in the hotel. Emma had hysterics. The ambulance came from the emergency hospital. The police car and the photographers arrived. Everybody was very unpleasant to Forest.

"Those few minutes you held me up, mister, those few minutes could've saved her life. We'll want to see you," the detective warned . . . And when they opened Janey's room and found his photograph—the two of them—

And the agent had something to say, too, in a low, even voice.

"Boy, you really did it. This is it, you get off here. Why'd you let a rummy like that woman stay on? What's the matter, you blind or something you didn't see those big initials on his bag? And he signs in as Smith too! Then he goes ahead and holds a drinking party and you don't even stop him. Maybe the cops want you, we don't, *that's* for sure."

Forest hadn't a word to say. He just stood and listened and stared. He looked at Janey—the woman he had loved, who had loved him, whom he had thrown away because she didn't fit in with his hopes for promotion—hopes now ruined forever. He looked at her—the woman he'd locked out of her room and driven into the room of the man who had killed her. Forest thought of her wrecked life, her loneliness, her final realization that he had abandoned her forever when he had sealed her door. She had grasped, then, for any companionship, however sordid or brief. Now she lay on the floor, her face bruised, her head at an odd angle against the gas radiator. Her problems were over now, his were just beginning. He felt something in his pocket and, absently, he drew it out and looked at it.

It was the French key.

This was what he had lived by, as others lived by love or mercy or justice; and now—finally and abruptly and forever—he realized it was no longer of any use to him at all.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	**ROSE FINNEGAN**
TITLE:	***Paid in Full***
TYPE:	Detective Story
DETECTIVES:	Phoebe Loftus and Sheriff Tucker
LOCALE:	Ravensville, United States
TIME:	The Present
COMMENTS:	*About the worst crime in the world—the kidnaping of an infant . . . In her "first story" the author treats this difficult theme with unusual discipline and understanding.*

IT WAS HOT. ALL OVER THE TOWN OF Ravensville the night lay heavy and thick.

Out along Coat's Street Road, where the houses are far apart, a cool breeze sprang up around two o'clock. In his crib four-month-old Michael Howard whimpered in his sleep.

The tiny sound was stilled as he was lifted and carried through the loosened screen of his bedroom window into the cloud-blackened night.

Phoebe Loftus brushed angrily at her crisp, auburn curls. Her anger was directed at herself. She had overslept. The day was well on its way to being a scorcher when she left the house and got into the dusty blue coupe waiting where she had hurriedly parked it the night before.

As she drove down Coat's Street Road toward town, she could see the Howards standing by their mailbox. Like everything else about the Howard place, the box was sparkling and new, its flag up. Ralph Howard was holding a large, brown envelope. He held it tight, folded against his chest, his other arm encircling Betty who was leaning limply against him.

Phoebe swerved into the curved driveway and stopped. "Hi!" she said. "Hot enough for you?"

They met her cheerfulness with chilly silence. Ralph strode toward the car, his handsome tanned face set

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in lines of sternness. Following him, Betty stumbled, plowing through the crushed gravel of the driveway as if she were afraid of being left behind even for a few feet. In the harsh light of the sunlit morning Phoebe could see the swollen red traces of tears around Betty's quiet gray eyes.

"What do you want?" Ralph demanded as they stopped at the open window at Phoebe's side.

Obviously the Howards were in the midst of some sort of a crisis. Fervently regretting her impulse to stop, Phoebe tried to explain, "I could see from the road that you're waiting for the mailman, and if I know Henry, he may not get here until noon. I'm on my way to town, and if you want something mailed, I can drop it off for you."

"Noon!" Betty gasped. She turned, burying her face in Ralph's shirt front. She seemed to moan rather than cry, a low shuddering sound that was appalling in the clear beauty of the morning.

Ralph held her to him. Over her head he spoke to Phoebe, "You'd better get going. I hope for all our sakes that your stop here this morning is only what you say it is. God knows, we need our friends now."

Phoebe matched the earnestness in his voice. "Ralph, whatever is the matter is none of my business, but I *am* a friend. John is out of town, but if there is anything I can do, don't hesitate to call me. I'll be at the office all day."

Before Phoebe could put the car into motion, Ralph reached through the window and grasped her arm. His hold was painfully strong.

"Where is John?" he rasped.

"He went to Chicago."

"When did he leave?"

"He caught the two-thirty train."

"Why in the middle of the night? Why did he take that particular train?"

"To save time. That train gets to Chicago about noon. It will give John enough time to finish his business and catch tonight's train home," she said carefully. Ralph's inexplicably menacing manner was sending little signals of alarm all along her nervous system.

He released her arm and stepped back. Phoebe made no move to leave, but relaxed against the seat, trying in the dead silence to fathom his antagonism. In the six months that she and John had lived in Ravensville they had made few friends and except for the Howards they had no close neighbors. The small clapboard house on Coat's Street Road was the Loftus's only touchstone of permanence in Ravensville.

Their purchase of the house was a declaration of intention so far as the townspeople were concerned. Phoebe and John Loftus had come to stay. When three weeks later they had moved into their new home, and opened the freshly painted door of the Loftus Collection Agency, a good many citizens found a sudden interest in paying their bills before

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the tenth of the month—and without prompting. There was a general vagueness about just how the Agency was going to work, but most of the townsfolk agreed that it was bound to be unpleasant.

Phoebe felt all the pressure of the past months of unfriendliness in Ralph's grim face. Surely, she thought, it can't have anything to do with Ralph's credit. He is notoriously successful—yet what else could it be?

"Ralph," she said tentatively, "if you could just tell me what's wrong—if you could just trust me, maybe I could help."

He seemed about to speak when Betty stepped forward. Her voice was thin and tight. "We can't take a chance on telling you, Phoebe. We can't trust anyone—" Her voice broke.

Phoebe spoke directly to her, trading on their pleasant surface acquaintanceship, "I'm going to the office. I'll be there all day until five. The only time I'll be out will be at noon, and then I'll be in Markson's Drug Store. You can reach me anytime. Do you understand that, Betty? Do you believe me?"

"I do believe her, Ralph," Betty said slowly.

Betty trusts me. I know she does, Phoebe told herself as she started once more toward Ravensville; but Ralph, that's a different story. The look in his eyes! Like death itself. The man's almost at the end of his rope. I wish John were here—

Once in town, she quickly parked the car and headed for the office.

The hall was close and dim. Phoebe thought wearily of the small drugstore fan which was all she and John could afford. As she reached into her purse for her keys, she became aware that she had a client. He was lounging against the door, a tall muscular young man with a soiled T-shirt stretched across his broad chest. From under heavy lids he watched Phoebe's approach with practiced appraisal.

"Waiting for me?" she asked.

A sensual grin slid over his face as he left the question unanswered. "The guy that works here, he told me to come in today," he drawled.

"That would be my husband," she said with deliberate emphasis. "Come in."

Briskly she flicked on the fan and took a folder from John's desk. Conscious of his unblinking stare, she felt a maddening desire to check the buttons on the front of her pique blouse. "You're Edward Borme?" she asked, glancing at the folder.

"They call me Eddie."

"According to these records, you purchased a motorcycle from Ruper's Auto Accessories last March, and at present you have an unpaid balance of six hundred and twenty-five dollars. Is that correct?"

"You got a real head for figures," he said admiringly. "It sure is."

"Are you working?"

"Can't get me a job."

"Have you tried?"

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"Well, I ain't busted a gut tryin'."

"Have you made any effort at all to find a means of paying your account?" Phoebe asked patiently.

"I got a few irons in the fire."

"I'm afraid that won't be very satisfactory to Mr. Ruper. In view of your attitude I feel we must go through due processes either to recover the motorcycle or force payment," she said firmly.

Eddie sat up. There was a fierce light in his berry-black eyes. "It's gonna take more than a skinny little girl like you to force me to do anything, and as for takin' that cycle—nobody's gonna do that!"

"If, as I strongly suspect, you falsified your age on the original sales agreement, we will be dealing with your father instead of you. Are you underage, Eddie? And does your father know about all this?"

"I figured you'd think of that! My old man ain't gonna know about it. That's why I come in this morning. I come to tell you that I'll be payin' up in a couple of days," he said, his voice still defiant.

"Don't do anything foolish, Eddie," she cautioned. "If you can't work out a way of paying, it would be best to return the motorcycle."

He strolled to the door. "I'm keepin' the cycle. Just don't you worry, old man Ruper'll get his dough."

He closed the door with a bang. As she replaced the folder, Phoebe noted his address: Coat's Street Road.

The telephone rang sharply. As she picked it up, the courthouse clock started to chime and Phoebe could hear the chimes echoed delicately and beautifully by the bells of Miss Virginia Judge's hanging mirror clock. Phoebe hesitated, listening to the duet. She was well aware of the identity of her caller; it was not the first time they had spoken on the phone and always in the background was the sweet tolling of the clock, marking each quarter hour in Miss Judge's lonely useless life.

"Hello?" Miss Judge's voice came over the wire low and rich.

Guiltily, Phoebe returned to the present. "Hello. This is Mrs. Loftus."

"Miss Judge, Miss Virginia Judge. I am calling in reference to the little talk we had a few days ago."

Little talk, indeed! Phoebe flinched at the recollection. Miss Judge had entered the collection office with full confidence in the Judge prestige, her blue eyes remote. With a fine disregard for formalities, she had come straight to the point. The Judges, she informed Phoebe, had been trading with Cooper's Grocery not only for a matter of years but for several generations. And, as the last remaining Judge, she did not propose to alter her habits. The money owed she dismissed with a sweeping gesture of disdain.

Gently Phoebe had tried to explain. As Miss Judge knew it, Cooper's Grocery was a thing of the past. Plans were going into effect to turn that conservative establishment into a supermarket, and Phoebe and John

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had been commissioned to collect all overdue accounts.

In Miss Judge's case it had been pathetically easy to press the issue. Following instructions from her husband, Phoebe made mild allusions to the proportion of the outstanding bill given over to the purchase of alcoholic beverages.

Miss Judge's composure had broken.

"I am sure Mr. Cooper would not permit the ugliness of a lawsuit with an old customer," she protested.

"Mr. Cooper," Phoebe informed her patiently, "has moved permanently to Florida. The entire matter is now in our hands."

"I had always counted on Mr. Cooper's discretion—"

"I am sure you did."

"The bill must be paid in full?"

"By the end of this month or we are instructed to start proceedings."

Miss Judge had drawn a long, shuddering breath. "I suppose," she said vaguely, "I could raise money if I had to—there just never seemed the need."

"Why don't you think it over? I am sure you'll find a way to clear it up."

"Of course, there's the clock—my hanging mirror clock," she had explained. "There are always people after me to sell it. Yes," she said, rising, "everything can be arranged. I'll call you in a few days."

That had been three days ago . . .

"Yes, Miss Judge," Phoebe now answered automatically.

"I just wanted you to know that I will settle the matter we discussed—I will come to see you tomorrow."

"That's fine. I do hope you didn't have to part with your clock."

"As a matter of fact, I did. They will be coming for it today." And Miss Judge rang off abruptly.

Phoebe felt a twinge of pity as she replaced the phone in its cradle. Poor Virginia Judge. Her sympathetic musings were interrupted by the entrance of two men, one following the other like a well-trained watchdog. She recognized them instantly—a Ravensville institution, Sheriff Bib Tucker and his faithful deputy, Grover Arb. Grover leaned against the door regarding her with a look of unutterable sadness.

Sheriff Tucker lowered his huge bulk into a chair near the briskly churning fan. "Grover and me, we just came back from the Howard place," he informed Phoebe as he ran a thick finger under the folds of a Turkish towel which he wore between the fatty creases of his neck and the wilted collar of his white summer suit. The towel was damp, and so was Sheriff Tucker.

"Oh?" Phoebe raised her brows.

"They tell me you stopped by there this morning."

"That's right. I offered to take their mail in town for them."

"Any special reason why you should be so neighborly on this particular morning?" There was a steely glint in his eye which shone through his heavy-rimmed glasses.

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"No reason at all. It was just a sudden impulse. Look, Sheriff," she said abruptly. "I know there's something wrong, but I can assure you, I have no idea of what the trouble is."

"Mebbe so," he said ponderously, "but we're covering all the angles and so far you're the only person that's contacted the Howards since last night. I may as well tell you, that envelope you was so anxious to mail for them was full of money. Ransom. Little Michael Howard's been kidnaped."

"Their baby!" she whispered, her face whitened with shock.

"Taken in the night from his own bed. Screen cut." The sheriff leaned back in the chair, his leather belt squeaking from the strain. "It's mighty interesting to me that your husband should just happen to be out of town at this time. Suppose you tell me where he went—and why."

"He went to Chicago, last night." Hastily she sorted her thoughts. "He went," she said slowly, "on business."

"That's what I'd call a real non-incriminating answer, but I'm afraid it ain't clear enough. What kind of business?"

In defeat she said, "He went to borrow some money. It's just a matter of time now until the Agency will be on its own feet, but right now—well, we have to get a loan to tide us over."

A look of gratification slid over his face. "To Chicago to get money!" He exchanged a pleased glance with Grover. "Would you have any idea where that envelope Ralph Howard had was goin'?"

"No, of course not."

"To a post office box in Chicago. A real genuine quirk of fate if I ever saw one. Now then, Mrs. Loftus, at this point I ain't makin' accusations, but I would sure like to check your story. What hotel is your husband stayin' at?"

"No hotel," Phoebe said despairingly. "He is supposed to catch the evening train home. You can't reach him right now."

They shook their heads sadly, a mournful wagging in unison. "That kinda puts us in a stalemate." The sheriff pulled himself out of the chair and stood up, a mountain of a man. "Let's leave it that way for now, Mrs. Loftus, but don't go makin' no hasty moves."

After they had gone, she lit a cigarette with shaking hands. Michael Howard had been stolen from his bed and she was suspected! Sweet, helpless Michael. A sense of responsibility swept over her. If she hadn't stopped to speak to the Howards, she and John wouldn't be in trouble now . . .

As Phoebe sat down on a stool in Markson's Drug Store, she looked up and saw Grover leaning against the end of the lunch counter. There was no longer any question in her mind. She was the chief suspect. The deputy moodily consumed a fudge sundae while watching her in

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the mirror backing up the counter. When she returned to the office, Grover kept a tactful half block behind.

John's call was like a reprieve. It came after she had made countless trips to the window to check on Grover, who had taken a permanent post of observation across the street.

"Phoebe?" John's voice sounded impersonal with the distance between them. "I'm going to have to stay over. I'm to sign the papers in the morning."

She broke in impatiently. "You can't do that! You've got to get back here right away. Something terrible has happened. The Howard baby has been kidnaped."

"Are you sure?"

"I've never been more sure of anything in my life! And John—they suspect us!" she said hysterically.

"That's ridiculous!"

"It's worse than that. It's dangerous. They're wasting precious time watching me, and whoever did do it could be miles away by now. Please, please, come home, John."

"All right, honey. Don't worry. I'll see what I can do."

Reassured, she began to make up for lost time. Her typewriter was clicking busily when the door opened and her concentration was broken by the shrill voice of Josie Sims.

"Are you the one that sent me this?" She waved a letter at Phoebe, her angry motions stirring up gusts of heavy musk perfume.

Phoebe glanced at its contents. "It's one of ours. Is there some mistake?"

"You've made a big mistake," she said loudly, swelling her pointed bosom to impossible proportions. "I opened that account in my own name, and I'm the one that's responsible."

"Your husband, not you, Mrs. Sims, is responsible for the payment of your debts. The fact that the account is listed in your name is a mere technicality."

"You're trying to bluff me!" Josie narrowed her pale eyes speculatively.

"Indeed, I am not. Your husband is responsible. That's the law, Mrs. Sims."

Josie crumpled. Under her exotic apricot pompadour her face looked suddenly tired and old. "Mike can't know! You're young. You wouldn't know how it is to keep a man ten years younger interested. The clothes—perfume—all for him."

"I'm sorry, but you understand we're only working under orders from the store where you purchased these things."

"I know," she said wearily. "I'll pay. It may take a couple of days, though. You'll sit tight until then?"

"I'll sit tight," Phoebe promised.

Returning Josie's folder to the file, she noticed with a tug of apprehension that Josie also lived on Coat's Street Road. She glanced out of the window. Grover remained fixed, eyeing her window with dogged determination. Hesitantly, she went to the

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phone and dialed a number. A tired, thin voice answered.

"Mrs. Borme?" she asked. "Is Eddie there?"

"Who is this?" the woman asked suspiciously. "Eddie packed up and left town an hour ago. He's gone—gone for good."

"You mean he left home?"

"Said he was going to Chicago and get a job. Say, who is this anyway?"

Phoebe hung up without identifying herself. Perhaps, she told herself later as she drove toward home, Eddie's hasty departure had no connection with the affair of the night before, but as she passed the Howard home, she felt a shudder of fear. Unbidden, a picture of Eddie's lithe figure stealing out of the woods behind the house came to her mind.

She had been in the house only a few minutes when a car pulled into the driveway.

She opened the door to admit them. Sheriff Tucker, more wrinkled and perspiring than ever, sank gratefully into a chair. "We figured we owed you another visit, Mrs. Loftus," he said heavily. "This time it's to sort of put your mind to rest. Your office was closed, so we come on out here. Your husband called me about an hour ago."

"He called me first. I asked him to come home."

"Won't be necessary. I told him to stay over and finish his business, because I've kinda narrowed the thing down. Seems it's got to be somebody who was on hand right here in the neighborhood this morning."

She looked at him with new respect. "How do you know that?"

"Had a little help from Providence, you might say. When Henry Rush finished his mail route this afternoon, he noticed the stamp had come loose from that envelope Ralph Howard give him, and bein' conscientious, Henry drove back out here to tell him about it. 'Course, Henry coulda mailed it postage due, or he coulda put the stamp on hisself and collected from Ralph later, but he didn't. Came drivin' clear back out here for just a matter of a few cents."

"I still don't understand, Sheriff."

"Well, I was at the house when Henry drove in. Felt it my duty to look the thing over for fingerprints, and what with one thing and another, I opened it. Steamed it open. The money was gone."

"Gone!"

"Full of old newspaper. Somebody along Henry's route made a switch. It has to be that way. Henry didn't go no place else with the mail in the car."

"Whoever did it must have known the envelope would be in Mr. Rush's car?"

"Oh, sure, that part's obvious now. The envelope was in the baby's bed, waitin' for 'em when Mrs. Howard went in this morning. There was a note, too. Printed, so's there'd be no handwriting to help us along. The note told 'em just what to do, said it had to be mailed with Henry this

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morning, and that they'd be watched. Everybody knows that Ralph keeps plenty of cash on hand, so that's no help."

"He had that much money in the house?"

"Ralph Howard's probably the only man in this town with a safe in his own house. Had it built in when they built the house—one of them concealed wall safes. It was the talk of the town when the house was going up, so that's neither here nor there. Anybody from around these parts coulda figured he'd have a couple of thousand in cash handy."

"So it has to be somebody on Henry's route," Phoebe said thoughtfully. "Sheriff, do you know an Eddie Borme?"

"Eddie? That would be one of Carl Borme's kids. What about him?"

With a feeling of relief she told him of her interview with Eddie and his sudden flight a few hours later. Then, with a further sense of unburdening herself, she gave a brief sketch of Josie Sims's troubles. The sheriff maneuvered himself out of the depths of the chair and started for the door.

"Mrs. Loftus," he said, "you've been a big help. There's a couple hundred folks living along Henry's route, and we don't have time to sort through all of them."

"Time?" she asked fearfully, not understanding.

"There was blood on the window sill."

Left alone once more, the hours dragged by. A sudden urge hit Phoebe, and she lifted the phone, only to feel a flare of impatience. As usual, the party line was busy.

She was about to replace the receiver when she heard a familiar sound. In spite of herself, she stood eavesdropping with pleasure to the chiming of Miss Judge's clock. Against the background of the chimes a man was speaking. "Hattie was just more than pleased, Miss Judge. She wanted me to thank you for the flowers—" Phoebe hung up, feeling a little ashamed of herself.

A short time later she was ringing the doorbell of the Howard home. Betty opened the door.

"Phoebe! Bless you for coming!"

"I tried to call. There is something important—"

"I know," she broke in. "Ralph is with Sheriff Tucker now. They are following up the leads you gave them." She turned her face toward Phoebe. The trials of the long day had left their mark; she drooped with fatigue. "Could you stay with me, Phoebe? I'm so frightened."

"Of course, I will, dear, for just as long as you need me."

The two women sat quietly. Betty Howard stared into the blankness of the night, tears long since wrung out of her. At last Phoebe persuaded her to lie down, and in a few moments she dozed fitfully. Phoebe was left alone with her thoughts. For the hundredth time she turned over in her mind all that the sheriff had

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told her. Everything hinged on Henry Rush and Henry had noticed nothing. Or was that because there was nothing for him to notice? The phone cut into the silence, and she ran to pick it up before it could awaken Betty.

"Hello?" she said softly.

"This is Hattie Rush." The voice was high and whining. "Is my husband over there?"

"No, he isn't, Mrs. Rush. Is there anything I can do for you?"

"You can tell him for me—if he comes by there, that is—that I'm tired of stayin' here by myself. He's got no right to be out gallivanting around when there's a regular crime wave going on!" She hung up before Phoebe could reply.

Hattie Rush, she thought ruefully. Small wonder Henry was such a beaten-down mouse of a man. The clock whacked out one vigorous stroke. Ten thirty. She turned, staring at it. The clock—Hattie—the man she had heard talking to Miss Judge must have been Henry.

She shook Betty awake.

"Listen, Betty, does Miss Judge live near here?"

Betty looked at her in bewilderment. "Why, yes, she lives behind us on Ravensville Road. There's a path that cuts through the woods out back. It takes only a few minutes to walk it."

"I'm going over there."

"Not through the woods—not at this time of night," Betty exclaimed.

"I'll drive over. I should be back in about fifteen minutes. If I'm not, get the sheriff there right away."

"Phoebe, don't go! Wait for the sheriff. If anything should happen to you—"

"Nothing will," Phoebe said firmly. "But you stay by the phone, just in case—"

Turning the car into a narrow lane Phoebe could see the tall white pillars of the porch gleaming palely in the moonlight. A dim light shone through the drawn shade in one of the mullioned windows.

Phoebe left the keys in the car as protection against a hasty exit and picked her way up the walk to the porch.

At last, in response to her insistent knock, the door opened slowly. Miss Judge stood staring at her from the shadowy hallway.

"Mrs. Loftus!" she exclaimed thickly. Phoebe could smell her heavy winey breath as she spoke. Wavering a little, Miss Judge assumed a pose which was at once haughty and pathetic. "Are you so anxious for your money that you must invade my home in the middle of the night?"

Rapidly improvising, Phoebe replied, "I know it's late, but I came by to see if we couldn't work out a less inconvenient way for you to pay your bill. I do hope you haven't let your clock go out of the house yet?"

"The clock—" she said fuzzily. "The clock is gone. I have your money."

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"I'm truly sorry you had to part with a family heirloom."

Miss Judge made a regal gesture of dismissal.

"There was something else I wanted to speak to you about," Phoebe went on. "Did Mr. Rush stop by here this morning?"

"Henry? Why, yes. He stops by several times a week. He does errands for me in town."

"Perhaps you would know then. Does he have any pressing need for money just now?"

"Henry?" she repeated vaguely. "I should think he would. His wife has been ill with one thing or another for twenty years. The doctor bills must be a constant worry to the poor man."

Poor man indeed! Aloud, Phoebe started to thank Miss Judge and edge her way off the porch. It was seconds before she became aware of the sound—the dulcet fluid bells. In a panic Phoebe began to run, only to hear Miss Judge's voice, low and ominous.

"I think you had better come *into* the house, Mrs. Loftus—"

Rigidly Phoebe eased past her. The gun, a competent-looking revolver, was pointed with disturbing accuracy at her chest. Even in her terror, Phoebe could not fail to react to the beauty she discovered inside the house, the muted polish of wood and the gentle grace of the furniture.

Miss Judge watched her closely. "It's lovely, isn't it? My home! Everything in this house has tradition, and each piece has its own place in that tradition. I could never break the pattern—not for myself or for any of my things. We belong here together. Undisturbed—" Her voice trailed off into silence. For a moment she seemed to have forgotten Phoebe's existence.

She's mad! I've got to get out of here! Phoebe's thoughts ran crazily—like a mouse in a maze.

Cautiously, she ventured a step backward. The shot exploded into the stillness, and there was a horrible crashing of glass. And then an endless repeating of bells. Miss Judge ran forward screaming, a high twisted cry of agony. Then, above the demented sobbing, Phoebe heard with blessed relief a tiny muffled bleating. Michael!

Grover got through the door first. He halted like a reared-in horse at the sight of Miss Judge on her knees in insane grief among the shambles of her precious clock. The gun swung like a deadly pendulum, focusing its aim first on Phoebe, then on Grover. The moments stretched into an eternity. Then the bells gave a last feeble strike and the echoless knell claimed its mistress. She reached behind her and seized a tapering spear of broken glass.

With crazed fury she attacked.

A few moments later she lay still among the awful debris—her own victim.

The joy of finding Michael blotted out the futility of Miss Judge's suicide. Phoebe lifted the infant out of

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a carved cradle in what had once been a nursery. His blue eyes were scowling and his tiny mouth was opened wide in screams of protest. There was an ugly scratch on his arm, and Phoebe kissed it comfortingly as she hurried out of the house. Sheriff Tucker opened the door.

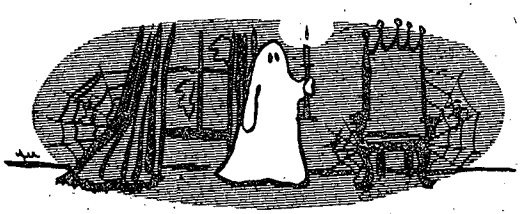
"Mrs. Loftus," he said, his face wet with beads of fear, "you're a mighty lucky young lady. I hate to think what could have happened here tonight if Henry hadn't sent us out."

"Henry!" Phoebe stopped in surprise.

"Chased us all over Coat's Street to tell us that he'd made a stop here this morning. Remembered some time after supper that he'd got out of the car to help Miss Judge pick a bouquet for his wife. She must have changed envelopes when he wasn't lookin'. Henry's always been a trusting soul!"

"Thank God, not too trusting," Phoebe said gratefully.

"It don't pay to be too trusting," Sheriff Tucker said soberly. "Miss Judge would have been one of the last persons in the world I'd have figured to do a thing like this." The sheriff shook his head sadly. "But don't let this night turn you against Ravensville. We need folks like you." He brightened with sudden inspiration. "You being in the business you're in, maybe you could look at it this way: Miss Judge owed a debt and she paid it. Yes, Mrs. Loftus, her account's paid in full."



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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **JOHN COLLIER**

TITLE: ***The Dog That Came to the Funeral***

TYPE: Bedtime Story

LOCALE: Somewhere

TIME: Sometime

COMMENTS: *The newest fancy of the casual, whimsical Mr. Collier whose stories, to quote Clifton Fadiman, "are refreshingly odd, aromatic and spicy."*

IT WAS AN HOUR OR TWO AFTER DINNER on the day of the General's funeral. The drawing room was large but ill-lit and the fire smoked a little. Mrs. Bulteney was alone with Harry Despencer, a lawyer who had charge of the affairs of two or three of his cousins and second cousins, and who rode to hounds three days a week. He was down there in his legal capacity.

"I must say, Di, I wish you'd called in someone other than Harding."

"Harding's all right. He's the doctor here. He set my leg damned well when I came off Blazer."

"I know. But I wish you'd had someone else in."

"Why exactly do you wish that, Harry?"

"Well, the poor bloody old man! Everyone knows he's drunk as a fiddler's bitch any time after ten in the morning."

"And a sober doctor might have pulled him through? Is that what you think? Is that why you wish I'd called someone else in?"

"You know very well what I wish," said Despencer.

"I hope I do. Because it's going to come true. Isn't it?"

"It most certainly is."

"Then why think of anything else in the world?"

"One has to think sometimes of what people may say."

"We've thought of it. I'm sick of it. Now we don't need to any more. Look, darling," said Mrs. Bulteney, "everyone knows about septic pneumonia. The penicillin works—or it doesn't work."

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"Harding gave him penicillin? I didn't know he'd even heard of it."

"He's drunk, but he's not such a fool. I filled the hypodermic myself. He was a bit shaky, so I did it for him. Four times!"

"It didn't do him much good."

"No good at all, Harry. It might just as well have been tap water."

"Well, at least it gave him a sporting chance. I mean, it'd be a bit of a fly in the ointment if he'd died of any sort of neglect."

Mrs. Bulteney always had her servants knock before entering. The cook-housekeeper now knocked, and was told to come in.

"If you please, ma'am, is there anything else you require?"

"Nothing at all. I think you might all go to bed. Good night."

"Please, ma'am, there's a poor dog out there at the back."

"A dog? What sort of dog?" asked Mrs. Bulteney.

"A cold one, ma'am, and a hungry one. Only we gave it a plate of scraps. Briggs thought if he might let it into one of the stalls, just for tonight. I mean, a night like this you don't hardly like to turn a dog out in."

"Proper wild goose weather!" the lawyer remarked.

"That's what it is, sir—a night for the geese. Briggs said—you know his way of talking, sir—what with the wind and the sleet, he said, you'd think the old Devil was standing astride the house, a-laying on to it with a cat o' nine tails."

Mrs. Bulteney's voice took on an edge of impatience. "Parfit, I asked you what sort of a dog it was. Do you know one breed of dog from another? Or don't you?"

"Well, I must say, ma'am . . ." Mrs. Parfit was a woman of character, but she was exceeded in this respect by her mistress, who had the additional advantages of great size, great beauty, and great arrogance. "No special breed, ma'am. Just one of them middle-sized, black, shiny ones. A good deal of the Labrador in him, I'd be inclined to say, ma'am."

"Well, a dog's a dog, I suppose." Mrs. Bulteney conceded. "No sort of dog's been turned away from this house on a night like this. But I don't want mongrels hanging about the place with Christabel and Lady coming in heat any minute. Give him a bed, and get him off first thing in the morning. But make sure he goes. You understand me?"

"Yes, ma'am. Thank you, ma'am. Good night, ma'am. Good night, sir."

"Good night, Mrs. Parfit," the lawyer replied. "I say, Di, I wonder if that's the dog that came to the funeral."

"And supposing it is?"

"It must have followed us home."

"Obviously, if it's the same one. Of course it's the same. What's the point?"

"No point. Idle remark," said Despencer. "I'm just as glad it's got a bed for the night. Listen to the wind! I bet the horses are snugger

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than we are. I'll say this for old Gilbert—he let the house go to pot but you've still got the best stables this side of Norfolk. You could say worse things about a place."

"I'm glad you like the place, Harry. It's snug enough upstairs. Do you want some more whiskey, or shall we go up?"

They went up. Despencer's bedroom was in the left corridor at the head of the stairs; Mrs. Bulteney's was in the big bay in the center. They both went into Mrs. Bulteney's room. As soon as they had closed the door, they fell into an embrace which was ravenous to the point of ferocity. There was that about this savage love-making—if the word can be applied to the congress of tigers—which indicated it was not occurring for the first time. It was less observable, but no less true, that this violence was natural, and a supreme fulfillment, to Diana Bulteney, and unnatural, an intoxication, though in a way all the more exciting for that, to Despencer.

"Well, I suppose I'd better get back to my room," he said.

"I don't think you really need to, Harry."

"I think I'd better."

"Come back a moment! Just a moment. Must it really be six months?"

"Darling, you know just as well as I do," said Despencer. "You can come up to town. Maybe we can go abroad for a month."

"I don't think I like this place any more, Harry."

"Oh, that's just the funeral and the damned wind and everything. You love it really; you always have."

"No! I'd like to sell out, pack up, and go to Italy or somewhere tomorrow."

"You wouldn't get much hunting," Despencer reminded her. "Besides, what do you get for a place like this in these days? We've been into all that. We'll be all right here. Couldn't be better, as long as we take our time and don't put people's backs up. If I could get two or three more estates to handle I could pay my shot."

"Who cares, you stuffy old lawyer, you!"

"I do, a bit. Not too much. But you've got a temper, you know. I mean, a fellow likes to stand on his own feet."

"Good night! Kiss me first! Oh, Harry, you don't know how different you are! Good night!"

Next day was clear, still, and frozen, as often happens after the northeast gales in the coastal districts of Norfolk. Hunting was out of the question so soon after the funeral, but Despencer felt it was all right to walk round the hedges with a gun. Mrs. Bulteney accompanied him. They ate their lunch under a big ash on the edge of a wood.

"There's that cursed dog sneaking after us!" exclaimed Mrs. Bulteney, "I gave word for Briggs to get rid of it first thing this morning. You heard me yourself. One of these days

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I'm going to sack the whole gang of them. Don't throw food to it, Harry, the wretched thing gives me the creeps."

"What's wrong with it? Perfectly ordinary sort of a dog."

"You didn't hear it howl in the night?"

"Not I, nor you neither. With that wind, you wouldn't have heard a pack of wolves howling. What you heard was the wind in some chimney or other."

"I seemed to hear it under the wind," Mrs. Bulteney insisted.

"Definitely not," said the lawyer.

"Well, it kept me awake anyway. I can tell you I feel like absolute hell today, and I don't want that damned creature looking at me. I don't like its eyes."

"Perhaps they remind you of somebody else's eyes?"

"There you are! You see it too! They're the same. I saw it yesterday as soon as he came up to us. I don't like it." Mrs. Bulteney shivered.

"There's a lot of black, beady eyes in the world, and that sort of dog usually has them. I wouldn't let it worry you."

"Well, it does, and if it comes crawling after us any more, by God I'll take that gun and shoot the bloody thing!"

"Don't talk like that, Di! You know perfectly well you wouldn't. After all, a dog's a dog, you know."

"Yes, I suppose it is. Drive it off! Chuck a stone at it! Drive it away!"

The lawyer waved an arm. "Here, you! Clear off! Go on! Get out, I say! There you are, darling! He won't come back in a hurry."

However, the dog, though timid, was seen about the house late that afternoon. After dinner Mrs. Bulteney questioned her housekeeper.

"Parfit, is that dog finally got rid of, or not?"

"Well, ma'am, it's been chased off with a broom three times."

"Has it *stayed* off? That's what I'm asking you."

"I haven't seen it since the last time, ma'am. We was as hard with it as we could bring ourselves to be."

"Well, if it shows up tomorrow I want Briggs to get out the Austin and take it into Norfolk. There's some sort of lost animals' home there. I want that *done,* do you hear?"

"If it'll let us lay hand on it, ma'am. It's got pretty shy of us now we've been after it with brooms. And, I must say, no wonder!"

"That's quite enough, Parfit. Go downstairs. I'll serve the coffee myself."

"Very well, madam. Good night, madam."

"Brandy, Harry?"

"Thank you, yes. Easy though! My God, Di! Easy does it!"

"Oh, come on! It'll cheer us up."

"I don't know that I want any cheering up."

"Then why sit there looking like a wet week?"

"Was I? Sorry! I was just thinking," he said.

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"Thinking of what?"

"Look here, if we were going to throw everything overboard and to hell with everybody, I wouldn't say a word. But we're going to get married after a decent interval; we're going to live here, and we want to stand well with the neighbors, and we don't want any stink. You know what backstairs gossip can be; we don't want any. You're altogether unreasonably worked up about that dog. What's more to the point, you're showing it."

"Well, if I can't have a nasty mongrel stray run off my own place, when I've got two champion bitches coming in heat any day, I'd like to know why, that's all."

"Di, you've been through a lot in the last few days. I can understand, but they can't. All the same, they've got eyes in their heads, and tongues too. They can spot a likeness just as well as you can. As a matter of fact, they've spotted it already."

"How do you know?"

"I could hear them down in the yard when I was dressing," said Despencer.

"Your dressing room doesn't overlook the yard."

"All right then—when I was in the lavatory. Briggs and the boy were down there; I suppose they'd just been chasing it away. I heard Briggs say: 'Well, let's hope that's goodbye to the poor old General!'"

Mrs. Bulteney almost burst. "I think that's the damndest cheek I ever heard of in my life!"

"Oh, I don't know. You saw it; I saw it; why shouldn't they see it? I mean, when that dog put his head on one side and looked at us when we were having lunch, I'd have sworn it was old Gilbert himself. But the point is, these people read nothing but the Sunday papers, and you can be quite sure they know it wasn't any sort of a marriage, and . . . are you listening?"

"Yes, I'm listening."

"Well, the dog turns up on the very day of the funeral and you seem afraid of it; you can just imagine the sort of nonsense they could make up. And that sort of thing's no better for being nonsense, let me tell you. In fact, it's all the harder to nail down."

"I see." Mrs. Bulteney bit her lip. "I suppose you're right. It seems a bit strange to have to mind one's p's and q's in front of the servants, I must say. I didn't tell you, but last night the creature gave me a nightmare, and I couldn't sleep after it, and somehow I can't shake it off."

The lawyer looked thoughtful. "You know," he said, "a nightmare can weigh on you all the next day. Did I tell you that in the last few months I've had the same absolutely identical nightmare six times at least, probably more. I'm in one of those terrific great cars they're putting out now. Best-looking car you ever saw in your life. Cream-colored, open, buzzing along at a hundred miles an hour . . ."

"I wish you were with me, Harry."

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"Oh, but, darling, I am, I assure you. Sorry! I didn't mean to interrupt."

"After you went last night," she continued, "after I'd heard the damned thing howling, I dreamt I was down there in the churchyard. I think I'd followed it down there, trying to kill it. Yes, that's how it was. And there it was on the grave, and I had to go up close, and it fixed its beady, black eyes on me, and by God, Harry, it *was* Gilbert! I tell you, Harry, I . . ."

"Keep your voice down, darling, for heaven's sake! I know what it is. You've got what they call a guilt complex. Now listen! Let me explain. I've read books on this Freudian stuff; a lot of it's awful rot but all the same there's something in it. They say when people wish other people were dead and all of a sudden they kick the bucket, the person—it's generally a kid but it can be anybody—he feels just as responsible as if he'd actually done 'em in. You see, it's all unconscious, so he can't be reasonable about it. So he gets the jimjams. Then the mind doctor gets to work, and tells him what's biting him, and he feels better."

"It's not like that," she objected.

"Of course it is. You've wished he'd die; I've wished he'd die. We've said as much to each other. It's only natural. If I'd had money enough there could have been a divorce, but as it was we were stuck. Now we both feel the same—glad as the devil and yet a bit sick inside, and of course you feel it more than I do."

"You think I'm making it up about that bloody dog?"

"I think you're making a hell of a lot out of a perfectly ordinary little coincidence. You want a good night's sleep, that's what it is. Got any pills in the house?"

"Sleeping pills? Yes, I have. Harding gave me some when I broke my leg. I didn't take them, though; I don't go in for that sort of thing."

"Well, take one tonight," he urged. "Get eight solid hours—no nightmares, no nonsense—and in the morning you'll laugh at the whole silly business."

"All right, Harry. Stay with me till I go to sleep, though, won't you?"

"Of course I will," he promised.

Perhaps Despencer should have taken a pill himself. At all events he experienced a return of the recurrent nightmare he had spoken of. Once more he was in that incredibly beautiful and powerful car, cream-colored or flesh-colored, open, and rushing along at a hundred miles an hour. Again he realized his foot was not pressing the accelerator. The car was going by herself, faster and faster, and there was no such thing as a brake. The wind rose to a menacing howl in his ears, and he tried to get out, but the seat held him. The seat gripped him, enfolding his loins in the close and fleshy grip of foam rubber that was somehow alive. And suddenly there was a loud crack, and he was wide awake.

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The crack was something new in the dream. Perhaps it wasn't in the dream at all. Perhaps it had come from outside. The thought moved him before it made itself known to him; he was already on his feet, on his way to the window. His pajamas were wet through and it was abominably cold.

Outside there was a breath-taking stillness and moonlight as bright as ever he'd seen it. The rather ugly fir plantations were black blocks defining the circle, its center also black with a pyramid of conifers in which the drive ended in front of the house. The ground had that glitter which foretells a thick hoar-frost in the morning. It was incredibly beautiful but too disturbing to be altogether pleasant. There was a dark movement, then a flicker of light which could have been the moon on the barrels of a gun. Someone had passed from blackness to blackness across one of the rides that radiated between the encircling firs.

"If that fellow's after the birds," Despencer thought, "if that fellow fired a shot right under the very windows, all I can say is he's got a hell of a nerve. Perhaps I'd better wake Briggs."

He put on slippers and a dressing gown and set off on this errand. In the corridor, looking toward the stairwell ahead of him, he could see there was an unusual amount of light there, as though the moonlight, though more attenuated and ghostly, was leaking into the house. After a few more steps he saw the reason for this: Mrs. Bulteney's door was wide open and the light inside was nearly as bright as day. Looking in, he saw that her bed was empty; the sheets, thrown back, had in every fold the likeness of sculptured marble. He was reminded of a tomb he'd seen in Italy or somewhere.

This changed his mind about waking Briggs. He went down into the big hall and found that the outer door, though closed, was not completely shut. He put out his hand to open it but it moved of itself, like the car in his dream. He suddenly found himself face to face, very close, with Mrs. Bulteney. Her face was so streaked and cratered by the blue moonlight that he didn't recognize her at first. When he did, he realized she must have been deathly white underneath. She had a fur coat on over her pajamas and she was carrying a gun. She spoke quietly but in such a way that he thought her next words might be very loud indeed.

"I missed him!" she said.

"Come in, for God's sake, and don't make a noise! Let me put that thing down. Come up to your room!" He took her arm.

"Thirty feet! Clear as daylight! And I missed him! I never missed like that before."

"Just as well you did! Are you absolutely mad, Di? If you shoot a man like that, it's murder."

Diana Bulteney began to laugh. Her laugh had undergone exactly

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the same sort of change as her face. Moonstruck! thought Despencer, who was by no means given to fanciful expressions. At the same time he thought, "She weighs as much as I do; I can never carry her up."

He pulled at her coat and to his surprise and relief she yielded to the pull, not in the least responsively but as if she had abandoned her body to any force that might act on it. Now Mrs. Bulteney, more than anyone else in the world, had lived in and for her large and magnificent body, feeding it great lumps of raw sensation at its lightest demand. This drifting hulk, uncertainly and stumblingly following the rude pull on its fur exterior, seemed to have suffered the same lunar ruin as her face and her laugh. The laugh continued as they ascended the stairs, but fortunately seemed to have no sort of force or breath behind it. By the time they got into her room it had ceased.

He seated her on the bed and went to close the door. Turning back, he found her with her head sagging forward and her eyes almost closed. Then he remembered the sleeping pill.

"Di, it's that pill you took. You're drunk on it. I say, you're sure you really did miss that dog, aren't you?"

"I missed him. I might have known I would."

"You'd better lie down and sleep it off."

"He would have died if I'd given him both barrels pointblank."

"You're half frozen. You're out of your mind. Get into bed and I'll cover you up."

"You can't kill them and you can't chase them away." She moaned.

"All right. Don't worry. Just go to sleep."

"I went to sleep. It wasn't any good. I woke up and he was out there, right under the window, howling for me."

"Do you mean the dog?" He shook her. "Are you talking about the dog? Was it the dog you tried to shoot?"

"Damned silly thing to do! He's dead already. Know what he died of?"

"Do you mean Gilbert?" asked the lawyer. "Are you talking about Gilbert now? Here, wake up! Tell me!"

"Tap water, Harry. That's what I put in."

Her mouth moved as if she were going to laugh again, but before she could do so she was asleep, and she slept till the low winter sun fell on her face in the morning. Then she woke and rang the bell.

"Good morning, ma'am!"

"Good morning, Parfit. What time is it?"

"Just gone half-past ten, ma'am. Mr. Despencer said you weren't to be disturbed. He left this for you, ma'am."

"Left it? What do you mean? Where's he gone?"

"Up to town, ma'am. He had to go all of a sudden, so he left the letter."

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Di, I've absolutely forgotten what was said last night. I do know, however, that no sort of life is possible for you and me. I have to get out if it kills me.

Regretfully,
Harry

"The dog's gone too, ma'am. Gone for good this time, you'll be glad to hear. A little boy came from Church Farm where the new people have moved in. No higher than that, ma'am, and frightened out of his life coming here. I think he had the idea we'd stolen his precious dog. The postman told him he'd seen it hanging about. I want my Blackie, he says, trembling all over. So off he went, with his Blackie on a piece of string, happy as a sandboy!"

"Parfit, I don't feel well today."

"Why, I'm sorry to hear that, ma'am, I'm sure. Would you wish me to send for the doctor?"

"Dr. Harding? No. On the dressing table there, or in the bathroom, there's a little bottle of reddish sort of pills. Give it to me, will you? Thank you. Parfit, unless I ring, I'm not to be disturbed on any account whatever."

"Not even for a little luncheon, ma'am?"

"Not for lunch or dinner either. I want to sleep. I may sleep right through. You may come in at this time tomorrow morning. Not before. Do you understand?"

"Well, yes, ma'am, if you say so. I hope it'll make you feel better, ma'am."

ONCE AGAIN . . .

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	ANDREW SALMOND
TITLE:	*Never the Twain*
TYPE:	The gamut of the genre
DETECTIVE:	William Stevenson
LOCALES:	England and Wales
TIME:	1949 and 1950
COMMENTS:	*One of the most fascinating "first stories" we have ever read—mystery, suspense, detection, baffling puzzle. Yes, we'll go out on a limb: once started, this tale is unputdownable!*

Unity Publications, Ltd.
25 Eagle Square,
London, W.C.2.
March 18, 1956

Ellery Queen,
Editor, EQMM,
New York 22,
U.S.A.
Dear Mr. Queen,

As you no doubt have heard, Mr. Herbert Consterdine resigned the post of FMM editor in February this year to take up duties as editor-in-chief of an Australian magazine group. Thanks to his very kind recommendation, Unity invited me to step into his shoes here.

In the course of familiarising myself with the office files I happened on the enclosed sheaf of correspondence a few weeks ago . . .

"Hillscrest,"
Lingbridge,
Kington,
Herefordshire
November 22, 1949

The Editor,
Fortnightly Mystery Magazine,
25 Eagle Square,
London, W.C.2.
Dear Sir,

On May 15th of this year I submitted a 15000-word novelette, *Whisper of Guilt*, for your consideration. Apparently it didn't measure up to your standards: you sent it back to me on June 14th with a formal re-

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jection slip. Between mid-June and September I tried to sell the story elsewhere, but without success. I decided, eventually, that it needed rewriting and I put it away in my "For Revision" file. To date I haven't found the opportunity for revising it. However—

In the issue of your magazine dated November 19th you published a story called *Where No Light Falls* by Gordon East. I wonder if you'd be good enough to let me have Mr. East's address?

Yours faithfully,
M. L. West

Unity Publications, Ltd.
25 Eagle Square,
London, W.C.2.
November 25, 1949

M. L. West, Esq.,
"Hillscrest,"
Lingbridge,
Kington,
Herefordshire

Dear Mr. West,

Do you know what a *non sequitur* is?

After half a dozen readings I'm still in the dark as to the connecting link—I assume there *is* one!—between the first and second paragraphs of your letter of 22nd inst. Would you care to enlighten me?

I'm sorry, but I can't let you have Mr. East's address. A matter of policy—I hope you understand. I will, however, pass on any letter you wish to send him, as long as it arrives here accompanied by a stamped envelope.

Cordially,
H. Consterdine
Editor, Fortnightly Mystery Magazine

"Hillscrest"
November 27, 1949

Dear Mr. Consterdine,

I'm disappointed. I thought the way I framed my letter of the 22nd might have started a small bell tolling in your memory. But you don't remember *Whisper of Guilt,* do you?

Here's what my last letter meant to tell you. I dislike putting it in this manner, but your refusal to give me Mr. East's address leaves me no alternative.

Where No Light Falls is practically a carbon copy of *Whisper of Guilt.* The names of the characters are different, and one or two incidents are not quite the same—basically, though, the plots are identical.

Now will you let me have Mr. East's address?

Yours sincerely,
M. L. West

Unity Publications, Ltd.
December 3, 1949

Dear Mr. West,

With reference to your letter of 27th ultimo, will you please confirm that your story, *Whisper of Guilt,* has not been published anywhere?

Cordially,
H. Consterdine

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"Hillscrest"
December 6, 1949

Dear Mr. Consterdine,

If you check back on my letter dated November 22nd, you will find I said that *Whisper of Guilt* was in my revision file. It is still there. It has N-E-V-E-R been published—more's the pity. But a *copy* of it has —*Where No Light Falls!*

Yours sincerely,
M. L. West

Unity Publications, Ltd.
December 8, 1949

Dear Mr. West,

I don't know what you are trying to do or prove, but I suggest in all sincerity that you take your troubles to a lawyer.

Cordially,
H. Consterdine

"Hillscrest"
December 11, 1949

Dear Mr. Consterdine,

Steady on there! I can't really blame you for getting all hot and bothered when confronted with a letter that hints at plagiarism, but—*can* it be plagiarism when one of the stories hasn't seen the light of print?

Seriously, though, I suspect we're faced with one of those once-in-all-eternity coincidences—Mr. East and I fathered practically identical brain children, only his developed fast and went to university while mine lagged behind in grammar school! The reason I wanted East's address was to ask him how and when the story plot occurred to him, for it's by no means improbable that we both got our ideas from the same source—perhaps a paragraph in a newspaper, or a scene in a film, or—Why, there's the germ of a plot in *that* thought itself!

However, I've always been averse to writing to anyone at a c/o address—an illogical idiosyncrasy, I admit, nevertheless it's too strong for me to break. So if you are still unwilling to provide me with Mr. East's home address let's forget the whole thing.

Yours sincerely,
M. L. West

"Hillscrest"
December 17, 1949

Dear Mr. Consterdine,

Enclosed please find *The Dark Corridor,* which I hope will find favour with you.

Yours sincerely,
M. L. West

Unity Publications, Ltd.
December 31, 1949

Dear Mr. West,

Thank you for letting me see the attached manuscript, but I regret it is not suitable for publication in *FMM.* I would suggest that you incorporate a little more human interest in the story, and make it less of an academic puzzle.

Cordially,
H. Consterdine

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"Hillscrest"
July 11, 1950

Dear Mr. Consterdine,

Please reread the correspondence that passed between us in November and December of last year. Remember me, now? Right. Now reread my letter of December 17, 1949, and the carbon of your reply dated December 31, 1949.

After you've done all that, send for a copy of the most recent issue of your magazine—yes, that's the one: Vol. XXII, No. 5, dated July 8. Turn to Page 37. And what do you see? —why, another yarn by our old friend, G. East—*How Dark the Path.*

Enclosed is *The Dark Corridor*—which hasn't been out of my possession since you rejected it. I invite you to compare it with East's story —after which I'll be glad to have your comments.

Yours sincerely,
M. L. West

Unity Publications, Ltd.
July 15, 1950

Dear Mr. West,

I'm investigating the matter mentioned in your letter of July 11, and I'll be writing to you again later.

Cordially,
H. Consterdine

Unity Publications, Ltd.
July 15, 1950

A. Tyrell, Esq.,
"Valesview,"
Llangad,
New Radnor,
Radnorshire,
Wales

Dear Mr. Tyrell,

You've had a couple of stories accepted by me during the last twelve months—*Where No Light Falls* published in *FMM* dated November 19 last, and *How Dark the Path* printed in the recent July 8 number. In each case the story appeared under your chosen pseudonym, "Gordon East."

Now, I have an unusual request to make. If you still have in your possession the original drafts, handwritten or typed, of these stories, I wonder if you'd be good enough to send them to me in the enclosed envelope? Naturally, I'll return them.

For reasons which can't be disclosed for the time being, I'm not at liberty to tell you why I'm asking this favour, but I'd greatly appreciate it if you would be good enough to grant my request.

Cordially,
H. Consterdine,
Editor, Fortnightly Mystery Magazine

"Valesview"
July 18, 1950

H. Consterdine, Esq.,
Editor, *FMM,*
25 Eagle Square,
London, W.C.2.

Dear Mr. Consterdine,

Your letter of July 15 intrigues me. I've spent most of the weekend trying to puzzle out the reason behind

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your request. It was completely in vain, though.

I'm sending the rough drafts you ask for. They're mighty untidy and I'm afraid you'll find them almost indecipherable in parts, but they're what you want, so you say, and an editor's wish is an author's command, so—

You'll let me in on the mystery in due course—I hope?

No hurry about returning the drafts.

Yours sincerely,

A. Tyrell

Unity Publications, Ltd.
August 1, 1950

Dear Mr. West,

With further reference to your letter of 11th ultimo, have you kept your original draft of *The Dark Corridor?* It doesn't matter how rough it is, or whether it's typed or not, but if you still have it may I see it, please? And at your earliest possible convenience.

I'd also like you to send me your typed manuscript of *Whisper of Guilt,* together with the first draft thereof, if you haven't already destroyed it.

Cordially,

H. Consterdine

"Hillscrest"
August 4, 1950

Dear Mr. Consterdine,

As requested, here are the rough drafts—revised, re-revised, and re-re-revised!—of *The Dark Corridor* and *Whisper of Guilt.* Also the typescript of the latter story.

Under separate cover I'm sending you *Weapon Number 6.* Do me a favour, please, if you find this story "does not meet your editorial requirements." Don't return it to me. Lock it away in your office safe, and merely send me a rejection slip.

Yours sincerely,

M. L. West

Unity Publications, Ltd.
August 9, 1950

W. F. Stevenson, Esq.,
251 Marfield Street,
Castle Bromwich,
Birmingham

Dear Bill,

You're fond of fictional puzzles. How'd you like to tackle a real-life one?

In this parcel you'll find a file of correspondence, two copies of *FMM,* authors' typed manuscripts, *How Dark the Path, The Dark Corridor, Whisper of Guilt,* and *Where No Light Falls,* and the rough drafts of the stories.

Read the letter file first.

Let me know as soon as you can whether you feel like having a go at investigating this curious business. Do you think it's a hoax?

Cordially,

Bert

P.S. You may wonder why I've decided to take action on West's complaint, instead of telling him for the second time to hire a lawyer. The explanation is sim-

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ple: the mystery of these duplicated stories intrigues me, and I've a strong suspicion I'd never get to know the answer if I told West to dig it out for himself.

Unity Publications, Ltd.
August 10, 1950

Dear Mr. West,

Sorry, but *Weapon Number 6* doesn't quite make the grade.

I'm keeping it in a safe place, as per your request. No doubt you'll advise me when you want it back.

Cordially,
H. Consterdine

251 Marfield Street,
Castle Bromwich,
Birmingham
August 11, 1950

H. Consterdine, Esq.,
Editor, *FMM,*
25 Eagle Square,
London, W.C.2.

Dear Bert,

I'm hooked!

If it's a hoax, the point eludes me. If it's not a hoax—no, I won't stick my neck out in advance.

Investigations will commence tomorrow.

Yours noncommittally,
Bill

Birmingham
August 12, 1950

Dear Bert,

I visited West today. Hell of an out-of-the-way place where he lives. Real back of beyond. I mention this in the hope that little items like the high cost of petrol, etc., won't be forgotten when you're deciding how much to offer me for my next opus! —which, incidentally, is coming along very nicely now. Barring unforeseen hitches, I believe I'll be able to deliver it into your eager paws by the end of the month. But I digress.

West is no hoaxer. Of that I'm completely and unconditionally convinced. And you know me, old son: I don't convince easy.

He's a genuine free-lance. His den is chock-a-block with the evidence of the trade—manuscripts here, there, and everywhere, in all stages of completion, rough drafts galore, some typed, most of them in longhand. Authenticity was scribbled on every one. First drafts can be cooked, I suppose, but if the stuff West produced for my inspection was faked then I'm the illegitimate offspring of an inuus—Barbary ape to you! Nobody, but nobody, would go to all that trouble for the sake of a leg-pull.

His record system is neat and simple: a card index box with a six-by-four pasteboard for every story he's finished, with the names of the magazines he's tried them on, dates of submission and return. There's also an £.s.d. column on each card, but nary a one had an entry in it. Reason: to date his number of acceptances is zero.

His collection of rejection slips is —there's only one word for it—for-

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midable! Sight of all those disheartening little pieces of paper filled my eyes with nostalgic tears. They brought back memories—but am I glad I didn't have to fight my way past 200 of the ruddy things before *my* first clicked! For sheer persistence this laddie really deserves a medal.

You've seen some of his stuff, so you know what's wrong with it. Cardboard characters—forgive the cliché—no life in them at all. Pity, because his plots are nice and tight. What he needs is a shaping course with one of the better schools of authorship. But he's a stubborn fellow, as his pile of rejection slips indicates, and he refuses to admit he needs help or guidance. He's determined to break into the writing game unaided.

And personally I wish him lots of luck.

Howsomever—he can throw no light on the queer how-d'you-do involving "East." He has no idea that East is a pseudonym. I didn't enlighten him. I think he was quite prepared to accept the *Whisper of Guilt* and *Where No Light Falls* doublet as an exceptionally suitable item for a Believe It or Not strip: but that dog won't bark twice—neither for him nor for me!

I intend to look up friend Tyrell tomorrow.

My report on him will be in your hands Monday A.M.

Yours aye,

Bill

Birmingham
August 14, 1950

Dear Bert,

Jim Benson of the *Argus* dropped in unexpectedly on Saturday morning, so I had to scrub around my proposed sojourn into the Welsh wilds. But Phoebe, bless her heart, elected to deputize for me.

I briefed her so that she knew exactly what to say and exactly what to look for.

Here's the gist of her report: She located the Tyrell residence—apparently it's as much off the beaten track as West's place—found him at home, and spun him a yarn about being a member of your staff who's going round collecting personal data on contributors to *FMM* for a projected Meet Your Authors feature. That's the line I told her to use: you'll have to play up if you get a query from Tyrell.

He fell for it, hook, line, and jolly old sinker—who wouldn't, when Phoebe is the angler, eh?

He welcomed her in, showed her round his place, turned out all his files of carbon manuscripts, etc. Phoebe says that if his records are to be believed (and why not?) he's making a fairly successful career for himself as a free-lance author. Evidence: thirty acceptances in the last couple of years, receipts therefrom nine hundred jimmy o' goblins. Four of the yarns he sold to you—*How Dark the Path, Where No Light Falls, The Secret Code,* and *Around This Corner.*

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He's had *no* rejections since he started writing—so he says. Phoebe noticed that his records appeared to bear this statement out, but I think you'll agree that doesn't mean much. It's easy enough for an author to omit recording details of his failures. I know of quite a number of laddies who do just that—an innocuous form of ego boosting, I suppose. "100% record of success, old man—not a rejection in the lot." So I, like you, will accept Tyrell's claim *cum* a ruddy great *grano salis*.

Phoebe doubted it too, but she says she kept her doubts under cover, went on fluttering her eyelashes (you know how well she can do that!) to give the impression that she was completely overwhelmed by the Tyrell grand manner, hoping that his guard might slip. Apparently there was no guard to slip, however, and she came away convinced that the guy is no phony, that he's an author in his own right who would have no conceivable need to pirate plots in some mysterious and unspecified manner from the likes of West.

Incidentally, she quizzed Tyrell tactfully about the "East" nom de plume, but he showed no guilty reaction. He explained that he'd considered a dozen possible pseudonyms, and had chosen that one simply because he liked the sound of it. Which sounds reasonable enough.

So there you are. The investigation has been a failure. I can't say I'm particularly happy with the results, of course. That both West and Tyrell should have got similar ideas for yarns, not once, but twice, is too much for anyone with only a fair share of credulity to swallow, and I'm still playing around with the idea that those two characters might be in cahoots. But the purpose of their jest or hoax, if that's what it is, has me flummuxed completely—and when I recall my vivid impressions of West's sincerity, I just *know* he hasn't a part in it.

I give up!

Yours aye,

Bill

Unity Publications, Ltd.
August 17, 1950

Dear Bill,

It was very kind of you and Phoebe to go to all that trouble over the West-Tyrell business. I appreciate it very much.

Naturally, I'm disappointed you weren't able to turn up anything suspicious—I don't like unsolved mysteries, in fiction *or* in real life. If you're still wondering about Tyrell's "no rejections" claim, by the way, forget it. *I* can support that claim: he's had no rejection slips from me.

Never mind—something may turn up yet. Until it does I'll have to practice delaying tactics on West. Or maybe I'll dump the problem back in his lap. I dunno.

Regards to Phoebe.

Cordially,

Bert

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"Hillscrest"
November 27, 1950

Dear Mr. Consterdine,

'Way, 'way back in August this year I sent you a manuscript entitled *Weapon Number 6* and asked you to retain it if you didn't find it worthy for print. Remember?

Fetch it from your safe, will you, and reread it. Now turn to Page 54 of the last issue of *FMM*—November 25. (This is getting tiresome, isn't it?) *Point 303* by—G. East. Don't bother to reread it: it's *Weapon Number 6* all over again.

Tell me—didn't *Point 303* ring a faint familiar bell in your mind when you read it on submission from East? Didn't you experience a suspicious feeling that you'd come across something like it not so very long before?

This thing is getting beyond a joke.

Yours sincerely,
M. L. West

Unity Publications, Ltd.
November 30, 1950

Dear Mr. West,

I appreciate your feelings. And I wholeheartedly agree that this matter has gone beyond the humorous stage. You'll have to be patient for a little while longer, though. I'm sure you realise that investigations into this kind of thing can't be hurried.

With regard to your query—have you any conception of the number of manuscripts that land on my desk *daily?* I assure you that it's more than just a few! A tremendous number of the manuscripts that come to me are rewrites and revisions—to say nothing of unrevised resubmissions. There's one crazy scribe who keeps pushing the same yarn at me at bimonthly intervals, hoping, I suppose, that one of those days I'll turn compassionate and let it in. He's been doing that for three years now!

No, Mr. West, I read so much stuff twice, three times, four times, that faint familiar bells ring in my mind all day long. To forestall the question which will now spring automatically to your mind—we *do* have a foolproof system here for detecting plagiarism. But *that,* as I think you yourself admitted in a previous letter, isn't quite the name for your peculiar, or should I say, unique troubles.

Cordially,
H. Consterdine

Unity Publications, Ltd.
December 2, 1950

Dear Bill,

Attached is a copy of the latest letter I've received from West. It's self-explanatory. What he says is absolutely true.

Do you feel like having another crack at this thing—or would you rather I handed it to a private op?

It occurs to me that tactful questioning of Tyrell's and West's associates might be fruitful. But that's up to you.

Cordially,
Bert

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Birmingham
December 4, 1950

Dear Bert,

O.K. One last pry will be executed tomorrow by yours (unpaid!) truly. If I don't strike pay dirt, I think you'd be well advised to start ladling out the golden guineas to a private eye without delay.

Yours aye,

Bill

5 DEC. 50.

CONSTERDINE UNITY LONDON.

BULLSEYE STOP SOLVED IT STOP REPORT IN POST.

STEVENSON.

Birmingham
December 5, 1950

Dear Bert,

My telegram wasn't a leg-pull—the "case" *is* solved. But I'll bet my Sunday boots that the solution won't help you one little bit—you *still* won't know how to word your next letter to West. Read on and you'll find out what I mean.

West's address is: "Hillscrest," Lingbridge, Nr. Kington, Herefordshire.

"Hillscrest" is the eastern half of a duplex house which stands square on the Radnor-Herefordshire border—and, believe it or not, the line of demarcation between the two counties *runs right through the middle of the building!* This strange fact I checked for myself in the County Surveyor's files in the Hereford office.

Tyrell's address is: "Valesview," Llangad, Nr. New Radnor, Radnorshire, Wales.

Can't you guess what's coming?—*"Valesview" is the western half of the same house!*

Take a deep breath now—here comes the *real* shocker!

West and Tyrell are most certainly in cahoots. But they can't help it—because they are *one and the same person!* West, though, has no knowledge of his existence as Tyrell, and Tyrell doesn't know he's also West!

Blown a gasket yet?

Put quite simply, West-Tyrell is—are?—an incredible case of dual personality.

I called on "Tyrell" this A.M. At first I had no idea that it *was* "Tyrell"—when he answered my knock on the door of "Valesview" he was, to me, West, the fellow from the other half of the house. His "pretence" at not recognising me, his insistence that his name was "Tyrell," convinced me straightaway that he and West had been indulging in a spot of monkey business at our expense. But, being me, I decided to play along for a time and let this half of the hoax-team get himself a little deeper in the mire before I let him have both barrels. I let my anger simmer slowly. It was just as well that I did—because thirty minutes of conversation with him was enough to make me start thinking again. Hard.

Somehow I managed to get away from him without spilling any

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beans, and I drove straight to Lingbridge and looked up the local G.P. What he told me sent me careering off east to Rocklow. There I contacted the chief psychiatrist of the Rocklow and District Mental Hospital, an extremely co-operative fellow by the name of Weinbaum. From him I learned the complete inside story.

Up to a couple of years ago, two families, each consisting of a middle-aged couple and a bachelor son, lived in the house on the border—the Wests lived in "Hillscrest," the Tyrells in "Valesview." The two families got on very well together, and the sons, who were about the same age, were just like brothers. One of the many interests they had in common was the ambition to authorship.

The Wests owned a shooting-brake, in which they were in the habit of travelling about Wales and the border country on weekends. They often took the Tyrells with them.

One summer day in 1948 the two families went off on such an outing, to Aberystwyth. On the return journey, at night, on a sharp curve a few miles out of Rhayader, Death, with no warning whatsoever, reached out for five of the six occupants of the vehicle.

It was one of those freak accidents. A sudden, inexplicable landslide, a boulder-strewn road, an uncontrollable steering wheel—and, on the near side, a twenty-foot, nearly vertical drop to scrub-covered ground, with rock outcroppings.

West, Jr., was the sole survivor. He was thrown out of the driving seat and escaped with a number of minor scratches and bruises—and a not-so-minor injury to his head.

He was carried off to the hospital unconscious, and the staff there had the unenviable task of breaking the news of the tragedy to him when he came round. Lord only knows what agonies of mind he suffered as he lay in the ward, waiting for his head injury to heal. His grief still lay heavy on him when he was discharged a fortnight later.

His father had been a man who believed in life insurance, and West converted the cash that was paid out on two or three substantial policies into a small annuity, threw up his job, and settled down to try to augment his income with his typewriter. He seemed determined to bury his grief in solitude and sheer hard work.

With the money that came to him under his father's will he bought "Hillcrest" and "Valesview" outright. He also purchased the furniture in "Valesview" as it stood, from the Tyrell family's estate.

He hired a woman from Lingbridge to come and do the household chores; and it was this daily help who, after a month or so, began to carry strange tales back to the village. When the tales reached the ears of the local G.P. he found a pretext for paying a visit to the

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double house on the border—and what he discovered brought Weinbaum into the affair.

The two houses are connected by an internal communicating door. West is a perambulatory thinker: when he is mulling over a plot he meanders about the house. It was inevitable that his wanderings should take him through the communicating door and into the old Tyrell residence—which was now his by right of purchase. As time went on, West began to spend more and more of his waking hours in "Valesview" and, quite unknown to him, his personality started to undergo a startling change whenever he stepped into the house next door. The metamorphosis, gradual at first, soon speeded up, until it reached the weird stage where *to all intents and purposes West became Tyrell whenever he entered "Valesview."*

According to Weinbaum, there was a simple psychological explanation for this. West has a very strong subconscious feeling of guilt about the car crash. The fact that the coroner's jury had completely exonerated him made no difference—deep inside his mind he believes that he, as driver of the vehicle, was in some way responsible for what happened. So, by assuming the personality of "Tyrell," he brings his dead friend back to life at intervals—and this alleviates the guilt complex, see?

Well, Weinbaum, with the co-operation of the authorities at the hospital where West had been laid up after the crash, arranged for West to be recalled, ostensibly for a post-operative checkup on the head injury. They gave him the works—skull X ray, EEG test, narco-analysis. Then Weinbaum collected all the graphs, recordings, and X ray plates, and went into a huddle with his colleagues.

They found that West's "peculiarity" was quite definitely "local"—it operated only when he stepped into "Valesview," and nowhere else. And it could hardly be classified as a dangerous delusion. The group opinion was that West might be cured by a prolonged course of electro-shock therapy—but there could be no certainty that it would do the trick without harmful after-effects. Psycho-surgery was *out*—Weinbaum explained the whys and wherefores to me, but I'm afraid my understanding got bogged down when he started talking about "topectomies" and "stereotaxic operations."

So, the upshot of it all was that the brain-boys agreed to leave the cure to the most certain healer of all—Old Father Time.

For what it's worth, my guess about the "plagiarisms" is this: West would get an idea, rough out his plot, use his Remington portable to pin it down in typescript. Later, when the "Tyrell" personality was dominant, his subconscious would dig up the idea again, and he'd sit down and knock it into story shape on the old Barlock in "Valesview." I think it's reasonable to assume that

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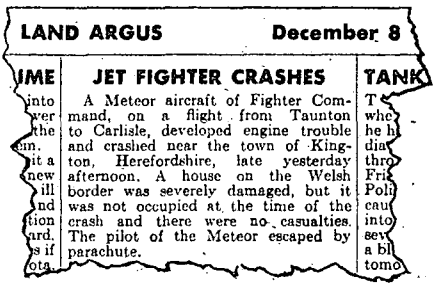
on occasion the reverse occurred—i.e., "Tyrell" got the idea first. But why West could turn out saleable stuff as "Tyrell" but never as himself, and why, when he was "Tyrell," he chose a pseudonym for his yarns which was the geographical obverse of his own name, are, I think, problems best left to fellows like Weinbaum to resolve.

Point is, now that you know the truth, can you think of a way to use it? You've *still* got a problem on your hands, me bhoy—a real dilly!

Yours aye,

Bill



LAND ARGUS December 8

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JET FIGHTER CRASHES

A Meteor aircraft of Fighter Command, on a flight from Taunton to Carlisle, developed engine trouble and crashed near the town of Kington, Herefordshire, late yesterday afternoon. A house on the Welsh border was severely damaged, but it was not occupied at the time of the crash and there were no casualties. The pilot of the Meteor escaped by parachute.

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Birmingham
December 10, 1950

Dear Bert,

Remember the expression we had in the RAF for types who never seemed to find any trouble at all in getting out of predicaments? Something connected with frogs?

Read the attached clipping and you'll see what I'm driving at!

Your worries are over. Surely I don't have to tell you the name of the "house on the Welsh border!"

One of the Meteor's engines ploughed right through "Valesview" and practically demolished it. "Hillscrest" is still standing, but it's in a sorry state—windows shattered, most of the roof tiles broken, walls cracked in half a dozen places. The newspaper report says severe damage. *I'd* say the place was beyond repair. West is of the same opinion. He's talking of renting a flat in Hereford.

At any rate, "Tyrell" is now dead and gone—completely and irrevocably. There's no reason, therefore, why you shouldn't drop West a line informing him, quite truthfully, that Author East has departed this life, and that you feel the investigations you've been conducting should not be pursued any further. I'm sure he'll concur.

You may be tempted to let the thing end at that point. I'm of the opinion that you'd be unwise if you did. Why not, when he next submits a story, put the idea to him about taking a correspondence course with an authorship school? Coming from you, the suggestion would carry a lot of weight. I'm convinced that even a few lessons would help him to iron the starch out of his story characters and make them the living people they were when "Tyrell" was their creator. Then you wouldn't be minus a competent contributor, as you are at present.

It's worth thinking over.

Yours aye,

Bill

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. . . You can well imagine that I found certain parts of it made astonishing reading!

However—after my mind had stopped spinning and my eyes stopped resembling organstalks, the idea came to me that these letters are loaded with dramatic interest—enough, I feel, to merit their being strung together and presented in story form. You'll observe that the letters are complete in themselves and dovetail perfectly; there wouldn't be any need at all for extraneous or connective commentary.

For reasons which I'm sure you'll appreciate, it's a story I couldn't run in FMM, but if you've a hole in EQMM that needs filling you're hereby invited to make use of the material.

There are no copyright problems. I contacted Messrs. Consterdine and Stevenson as soon as I thought of passing the file to you; they both agree the idea's a good one, and they raise no objection to their letters being published. As for obtaining West-Tyrell's sanction—that was easily arranged!

Yours sincerely,
M. L. West
Editor, Fortnightly Mystery Magazine.

NEXT MONTH . . .

Don't miss Stanley Ellin's newest story. Two of Mr. Ellin's stories have won the coveted Edgar—the highest award given by the Mystery Writers of America—as the best detective-crime short stories published in 1954 and 1956. Stanley Ellin's mystery stories appear exclusively in *EQMM*.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **MICHAEL FORRESTIER**

TITLE: ***The Portuguese Instructor***

TYPE: "Gentle Grafting"

LOCALES: New York and Laredo

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *About a love-sick teacher of languages who became "a man haunted by fear of the Army of the Kentuckies" . . . A delicious story!*

WE WERE DRINKING PERNOD with grenadine as we sat by the sun-splashed fountain, in the sweet shade of the lime trees.

There were Max Struber and myself; *don* Felipe, our village Chief of Police; and a hot-eyed young man whom *don* Felipe had introduced as Paco. This Paco sat thin and silent, chain-smoking Faros; he kept his eyes on me when he was not glancing nervously behind him.

There is a sort of loose magic in Pernod. After the third round, I said, "Undoubtedly, the northerners are a vigorous people with an itch to improve themselves and their neighbors. Yet how could one hesitate to choose between that estimable character and the soul, the music, the understanding of the south?"

To my astonishment Paco's dour expression lifted; he smiled. "You are not then a North American?"

Don Felipe quickly assured him that in spite of my appearance I was a tropical product.

"*Aie,* forgive me, but my life depends upon my caution." Paco spoke with the lisp of a *gachupín*—a native of Spain. "In these days of universal spying and the infiltration of saboteurs one must preserve the reticence of tombs. In me—a simple anarchist, a poet—you look upon a man haunted by fear of the Army of the Kentuckies."

"A dangerous position for any poet to be in," I sympathized. "What induced you to place yourself in such peril?"

"Hear me, and you will understand that I have the right to suffer perpetual anxiety. The Army of the Kentuckies, saints defend me! It is greater than the Army of Mr. Eisenhower, as I have discovered.

"Two years ago, when it became

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appropriate for me to absent myself from Spain, I went to New York and there I rented a room in the Spanish quarter where, by the courtesy of heaven, the landlady had a daughter.

"How can I describe her? Imagine to yourself the softness of an Andaluz night, the rose-perfumed pavilions of the Alhambra, guitars and red wine. Wring them together and you have only the shadow of my Chula, my passion flower.

"Let me admit that as I grew to know her I found that Chula lacked perception of the poetic arts. So naturally I undertook to instruct her. You sensitive *caballeros* will understand that one cannot convey the magic of poetry—snap!—in a minute. One needs an ambience, one needs time to warm the blood of so innocent a creature, until she opens to the meaning of poetic ardor. I, her slave, gave without stint, and to tell you the truth she was a precocious pupil.

"But as every cabbage has its worm, so Chula had her mother. What a monstrosity! That *zopilote* was so stingy she used one thick eyebrow for both eyes.

"I used to appease her with gifts; yet even so I kept out of her way when instructing my little Chula, for without doubt she suspected me of plotting an interesting fate for her daughter. She was forever making it plain to me that her plans for Chula lay in the direction of the fat fish peddler who used to come calling, bearing cods' heads and candy bars.

"In order to instruct the daughter properly I was obliged to take her far from home. And instead of agreeing to sit on a bench in a quiet corner of the park, where ideas can ripen, Chulita preferred the atmosphere of dance halls and movie palaces.

"Naturally, my friends, there came the time—what with keeping Chula out of the clutches of the fish fancier and buying presents for the Mama—when my wealth could be counted in centavos. The old shrew sensed my embarrassment and disclosed a bailiff's lust to be paid for the use of the parade ground of fleas which she rented me as a bedroom. Not only the back rent, but in advance.

"'Get a job,' she screeched. 'Dig ditches, count clothes in a laundry—anything. But go to work and bring me my money!'

"Me, work! How indelicate these mothers are, no? I know it well, the insensibility of the mothers of beautiful daughters. 'Get work, bring money, or get out!' Such is the sordid theme of their song.

"What should a man do in a case like that, and remain a gentleman? I searched my heart, I thought fervently of Chula, and in the end I sacrificed honor and became as practical as a crow. I took my last centavos to the office of a downtown newspaper and composed an advertisement. I offered to teach Spanish, French, German, or Italian at the

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convenience of any client; fluency assured.

"The clerk counted my pennies and looked up. 'You got another word coming, buddy.'

"What to add? I searched around for inspiration and saw a calendar on the wall. It was adorned with a view of the Necessidades Palace in Lisboa—so I quickly wrote in 'Portuguese.'

"After that I went home, glowing with achievement, and recited Lorca to the fleas.

"Next morning I was awakened at noon to attend the telephone. That instrument instructed me to call upon a certain Colonel Boomer; it gave me the address and warned me not to be late.

"At five o'clock punctually I presented myself at the home of this officer—in a towering *ziggurat* where millionaires nest and you almost have to produce a passport to get inside.

"I entered an elevator, the doors closed and the doors opened, and I swear to you I was lifted as high as the peak of Popocatépetl. A butler with the manner of an archbishop opened the door to a celestial annex upholstered in leather. Behind a desk sat a man with three pink chins. He wore a gray suit and I could tell by his tie that he was an asset in the nation's economy.

"'I see from your advertisement,' he said, 'that you teach languages. Right?'

"'That is correct, sir. Among my several talents I am fluid in many tongues.'

"'Okay, now it's like this. I've got a million dollars tied up in Brazil, and I got an idea they're robbing me blind. I'd like to check up on it. They speak Portuguese down there, so I want you to teach me Portuguese.'

"I opened my mouth, but the Colonel cut me short. 'I'll give you five dollars a lesson, three lessons a week.'

"I tried to speak again, but he said, 'That's my top price. You want the job, or no?'

"Alas, of all the languages I mentioned, Portuguese is the one I don't know. Yet I am not the type who would willingly disappoint his fellow men—certainly not at five dollars a lesson, three lessons a week. This ignorance was my private affliction, and I had no right to subject the poor millionaire to my misfortune. I decided to instruct him in my native speech. I am, as you know, a Basque."

"Cheeses!" sighed Max Struber. "Bascuene! It is a crazy schcramble of noises known only to Basques und to Gott. Und sometimes the Basques are confused efen."

"It is, as you say, an exclusive language," Paco agreed, "known only to us Basques, and to nobody else in the world. But Colonel Boomer's pleasure soothed my soul—and my pocketbook. So the lessons began.

"At my rooming house I became popular once more with all the

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money I was earning. That paladin of avarice, the Mama, even changed the sheets on my bed. The luscious Chula followed my discourses with invigorating interest—indeed, she drew my attention to certain points I had overlooked. That girl had talent. And the fish merchant grew to love me too, for I sold him, every week and at a discount, a selection from the cigars that Colonel Boomer kept on his desk.

"They were months of bliss, poetry, and the comforts of the Colonel's home. I taught that gentleman well, and, though he was impatient and crude, yet it was a joy for me to hear again my own tongue.

"All this while I observed that the Colonel never wore a uniform. How could that be? It's natural for an army officer to live in splendid luxury—that I accept. But how was it possible that a Colonel should prefer not to be draped in belts and medals and wear a cap with a polished peak? I could not restrain my curiosity, I had to ask him.

"He explained he was a colonel of the Kentuckies. This force, I learned through cautious probing, is composed only of men of great distinction and wealth. They are recruited from all over the land, but they wear no uniform. Their countersign is a secret drink made from the leaves of mint. The highest rank bestowed in their army is colonel—in fact, it is the only rank. Thus you perceive that it is a true Army of the People, composed of chosen citizens, all of position, and all equal. It is an Army such as we revolutionaries have always dreamed of. How superb, how mighty!

"The information I extracted from this incautious man showed me I had penetrated his nation's secret—that the Army of the Kentuckies is the true strength; it infiltrates the country at a high level, ready at any time to muster its arms, and unsuspected by others; so that the army of Eisenhower is obviously a camouflage. I, an anarchist, have experience in such things; I understand this stratagem. And this knowledge makes me a man dangerous to the United States.

"When I saw American soldiers walking in the streets in their uniforms and brilliant boots, I would turn aside and smile—I, who knew the truth. And I kept on instructing Boomer in the use of preterites and gerunds as used in Biscay.

"What followed was truly the fault of the man himself. One day he clapped me on the back and said, 'I'm going to have myself a load of fun tomorrow. The manager of my estates is arriving from Brazil and I can't wait to see his face when I talk to him in Portuguese. Will he be surprised!'

"Who could foresee such a barbarity, that a man should deliberately concern himself with the sources of his revenue!

"Within an hour I was on the bus to Laredo.

"And here I live in constant terror,

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with the truth of the American military position locked in my heart. I have thought to protect myself by approaching a certain foreign Embassy and telling them all and beseeching their sanctuary. But yet, am I so low as to betray the man who paid me well and smoked such expensive cigars? So I continue to exist in suspicion of every stranger. Each day I shudder at the image of an assassin's knife plunged in my back!"

"You have suffered, my friend," said our Chief of Police. "But have no more fear, for who can use knives in this town unless they negotiate with me first? And will I not warn you?"

"Thank you, *compaño*. I know I can trust you without the necessity of watching you. But with such an all-powerful Army . . ." Paco glanced nervously aside.

Silence crackled around us. At length I asked, "What happened? What did the Colonel do?"

Paco sighed. "I, too, tortured myself with that question. When I could stand it no longer I wrote from a false address to my fish friend. Naturally I was suspicious of his reply, since he had all to gain by insisting I keep out of the United States. But when he began to send me clippings from the newspapers I was able to unfold for myself the whole story.

"The day after I left, Boomer invaded Washington and went straight to the Supreme Command of the F.B.I.'s. Later he announced that the F.B.I.'s had refused to help him; but this was only a thin ruse designed to throw me off guard.

"Then Boomer called on every Embassy in Washington and tried his new language on them. But nobody could understand him. Even the Ambassador from Finland declared himself baffled. He pestered them so that finally all doors were closed to him. What could he expect? Washington is, after all, Eisenhower territory.

"In the face of growing hostility Boomer retreated to New York. He took to going out on the streets and halting anyone who looked like a foreigner, and he would speak to them in Bascuence. Then in English he would plead, 'What is it? It's got a vocabulary and a grammar. I know how to put sentences together. But in the name of God, what language am I speaking?'

"No one could enlighten him. How many people know Bascuence on the sidewalks of New York?"

Paco shrugged. "He spent all his time molesting people on the streets. He began to neglect his appearance and he grew more and more violent, until he became an object of suspicion.

"One evening in Times Square he accosted a lady of exotic aspect, and when she tried to brush him aside he seized her and began to shake her with much force. The police intervened. The young lady was a stomach dancer from a night club, and the two of them were arrested—imagine the unsympathetic quality

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of the northern police!—for giving an indecent performance in public.

"His fellow colonels at last came to his rescue. They carried him off from jail to their headquarters in the town of Lexington in Kentucky, and placed him in a 'Private Home'—a euphemism, of course, for security demands that they guard him closely."

Paco shrugged again.

"With the new techniques of brainwashing, how do I know he hasn't already broken down and confessed that he betrayed his country to me? And if he hasn't done so yet, is it not only a question of time? Then where can I hide from the secret agents of the great Army of the Kentuckies?"

NEXT MONTH . . .

STANLEY ELLIN's	*The Faith of Aaron Menefee*
MICHAEL GILBERT's	*Snap Shot*
JOSEPH WHITEHILL's	*The Town is Waiting*
C. B. GILFORD's	*Bull in a China Shop*
MORTON WOLSON's	*The Glass Room*

and a stunning suspense novelette

CHARLOTTE ARMSTRONG's *A Gun Is a Nervous Thing*

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **EDMUND CRISPIN**

TITLE: ***Gladstone's Candlestick***

TYPE: Detective Story

DETECTIVE: Gervase Fen

LOCALE: England

COMMENTS: *It looked as if Gina Mitchell was the only possible person in the world who could have stolen the gold candlestick that once belonged to Prime Minister Gladstone — until Professor Gervase Fen put his mind to the problem . . .*

GINA MITCHELL, SITTING UPRIGHT on the edge of her chair, accepted the proffered cigarette, lit it, looked her tutor defiantly in the eye, and announced without preliminary:

"I am *not* a thief. All the evidence is against me, I'll admit that, but nevertheless it *wasn't* me, really it wasn't, and what I want is for you to —"

"Steady," said Gervase Fen. "Take it easy, and don't try to bully me, please." But then he smiled; for he liked the girl, and clearly her distress was genuine. "Start at the beginning," he suggested.

Her air of defiance waned abruptly. "Sorry," she said. "I — I'm a bit strung up, I'm afraid. . . . Look, *you* don't think I'd steal anything, do you?"

"No, I don't," said Fen — an opinion which subsequent events proved to be well founded. "And if in fact you *are* being accused of having stolen something," he prompted, "I should like to know the details."

"Thanks," she said, trying to speak lightly, but failing. "Thanks. I was hoping you might be willing to listen, and — well, anyway, here's what happened. . . ."

Gina had only two living relatives, she said: her grandfather, Lord Stretham, who lived at Horton Manor, a few miles the other side of Abingdon; and her cousin, Humphrey Linster. Three months previously, these two had gone off together on a long cruise, in an attempt to bolster Lord Stretham's failing health. The

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project had failed, however: Lord Stretham had returned to Horton Manor three days ago in an ambulance, and had since been bedridden. And although he remained reasonably lively and cheerful, there was no certainty he would last out the year.

On their return, the travelers had found Gina waiting for them at the house; and this, she admitted, had not been exclusively an act of family piety on her part. The fact was, she explained, that she had wanted to do a drawing of an Adam fireplace in one of the rooms; sketching, her hobby, now and again earned her a little pocket-money, and there was a series to be completed by the end of the week.

"There are actually *two* Adam rooms in the Manor," she told Fen. "They're connected, end to end; and a year ago Grandfather had them locked up, because they weren't being used enough. He was quite willing to let me have the key — incidentally, he'd taken the key *with* him on the cruise — and also he asked me to stay a couple of nights, and of course I said I'd be glad to. So that seemed all right, and after I'd seen them settled in I duly went off and did my drawing. As Grandfather had warned me, it was very dusty and musty in there, after being shut up for so long, but I managed to survive that. Oh, and I should explain that it was the fireplace in the *first* of the two rooms that I was interested in; I never went into the farther room at all.

"When I'd finished, I closed up the shutters again, and locked the door carefully after me. But having done that, I unluckily forgot, for the time being, to return the key. It stayed with me till after lunch the following day — yesterday, that is: and unfortunately I'm *quite* sure that no one had the chance to 'borrow' it from me during the time it was in my possession.

"Well, the next thing that happened was that an acquaintance of Grandfather's, a man named Henry Challis, dropped in unexpectedly for lunch — this is still yesterday I'm speaking of. And *he* wanted to look at the Adam rooms. So Grandfather asked my cousin Humphrey to show them to him after lunch, and told him to be sure not to miss the big Eighteenth Century music box in the first room; and in the second, the pair of hideous great ornate gold candlesticks which someone had given to Gladstone in 1868 and Gladstone had hurriedly passed on to my great-great-grandfather; their gold made them worth about £400 apiece, Grandfather said, but esthetically they were quite monstrous, of course.

"So presently Humphrey and this man Challis came to me for the key to the rooms, which I still had, and off they went together — not separating at all, even for a moment — on their tour of inspection. Challis" — Gina grimaced — "well, I'm afraid there's no possible chance of his having been in collusion with Humphrey; nor of his having told lies for any other reason. In any case, as you'll hear,

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when they found the candlestick gone, they called one of the servants in as an extra witness, and I'm certain *he's* honest. . . .

"Anyway, in they went, and Humphrey opened the shutters in the first room and left Challis playing with the music box there while he went on to let some light in on the *further* room; and after a bit Challis joined him, and they saw straight away that one of the candlesticks was missing. Humphrey muttered that they ought both to be there, because they had been when he and Grandfather were in the room just before they set off on the cruise. They *should* have been standing one at either end of the mantelpiece, he said: but now, only too obviously, the left-hand one had vanished.

"When Challis heard this, he fetched a chair and got up on it — that particular mantelpiece is above eye-level — to have a closer look. And there he saw the — the imprint, I suppose you'd call it — of the candlestick's base: a clean, distinctively shaped patch without any dust on it worth speaking of. They called Baird, the manservant, and the three of them searched the room. No second candlestick. The windows, as well as being shuttered, were *nailed*, and quite evidently neither they, nor the expensive lock on the door leading to the rest of the house, had been tampered with in any way; I checked that myself, before I left. As to Challis or Humphrey or Baird having the wretched thing hidden on their — on their persons, the mere size of it made that impossible."

Gina flushed slightly. "So you see the situation that has left *me* in. Grandfather wouldn't even listen to me. He just turned his head away and said there was no point in laboring the matter, but that in the circumstances I might feel happier if I didn't remain in his house. So by dinnertime I'd packed up and left.

"There's no question of a prosecution, of course," said Gina in conclusion. "But just the same, Professor Fen, *I did not steal that candlestick!* I don't know who did, or when, or how, but I know *I* didn't. And although I daresay that being conscious of one's own innocence is a great consolation and so forth, that by itself isn't enough. I want my innocence *proved!*

"Please, Professor Fen — I know I haven't told it very well, but — but is there anything you can suggest?"

For a while Fen pondered. Then he said, "Assuming that you *are* innocent, and that the key couldn't have been borrowed from you while it was in your possession, and that Challis is an honest man — well, that really leaves only two possibilities, doesn't it? Your grandfather, or your cousin."

"Yes, but *how?*"

"Oh, as to *how* . . ." Fen chuckled. "The 'how' is quite simple, I should say — and you don't have to postulate any nonsense about duplicate keys in order to arrive at it, either. But then, analysis was never your strong point, was it? Your essays

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always take far too much for granted."

Then he frowned. "Proof, though. . . . Ah, well, there's at least a fifty-fifty chance, I imagine. What I'll do is go and see your grandfather about it: I do know him slightly. . . . And then — let's see, we've got a class in about a week's time, haven't we? With any luck at all, I'll have some news for you then."

But it was Gina, radiant, who produced the first piece of news at their next meeting, after the week had elapsed. "A letter this morning from Grandfather," she exulted. "*Very* apologetic, and will I please forgive him and go and visit him again as soon as I possibly can. But he doesn't explain *why*, and —"

"The 'why,' I fancy," said Fen, "is a letter he had from me, enclosing an authoritative laboratory report. Incidentally, I too have had an apology from him this morning. He was pretty chilly with me when I went to see him on your behalf, and although he allowed me to do what I wanted — and also unwittingly gave me the chance to pay an unauthorized visit to a certain bedroom — some sort of recantation from him was certainly in order. Your cousin Humphrey, I'm afraid, will now be in just as great disfavor as you were; only *he* deserves it."

Gina nodded soberly. "I thought it must be Humphrey," she said. "But honestly, I still can't understand how he managed it."

Fen snorted. "I told you that you took things too much for granted," he said. "And, of course, the thing you were taking too much for granted in this instance was that nice clean outline left by the base of the candlestick in the surrounding dust.

"Obviously — there being, apart from the duplicate-key hypothesis, no other conceivable explanation — obviously cousin Humphrey stole the candlestick *before* he and his grandfather went off on their cruise: intending, I imagine, to pawn it for ready money, and later to redeem and replace it. It must have come as a nasty shock to him when immediately on his return not one person, but two, were given the entrée to those rooms which only he and his grandfather had visited since they were shut up. *You* were a tolerable risk, since you were concerned only with the first of the two rooms — not with the one where the candlesticks were. But Challis was a different matter: Challis's attention had been specially drawn to the candlesticks, so that the disappearance of one of them was bound to be discovered — with the dust on the mantelpiece indicating that it had been gone a good long time.

"Well, you'll have realized by now what Humphrey did. While Challis fooled about with the music box in the first room — a predictable event — Humphrey went on into the second; and there had sufficient time to wipe the end of the mantelpiece where the stolen candlestick had stood; transfer to the cleared area the second candle-

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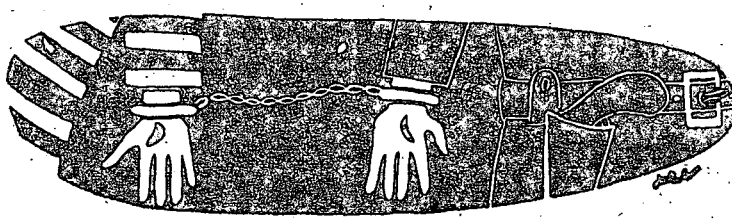
stick — identical, mind you; puff a layer of dust around it, with the help of his shaving-powder puffer, loaded in readiness with raw material from the vacuum cleaner; and then, leaving a fine sharp imprint, replace the remaining candlestick in its proper position at the other end of the mantel.

"I myself found that puffer on my surreptitious visit to your cousin's bedroom. By then he'd had time to wash it out and refill it with shaving powder; but at least it was *there* — and also I was able to make a note of the brand of shaving powder he used. The dust surrounding the supposed imprint of the stolen candlestick was thereupon sent by me, along with a sample from elsewhere on the mantelpiece, to a laboratory. The two lots proved to be substantially different — which unless one of them had been faked was a scientific impossibility. And to clinch it, identifiable grains of shaving powder were found in the first sample."

Fen smiled. "Satisfied?" he asked. "Happy? Good. We'll soon put a stop to that, though, because I now propose to listen to, and comment on, some of your views on Langland. Your essay, Miss Mitchell. *If* you please."



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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	**WILLIAM HOLDER**
TITLE:	***What's the Percentage?***
TYPE:	Detective Story
DETECTIVE:	Jordan
LOCALE:	A big city in the United States
TIME:	The Present
COMMENTS:	*Inspector Murphy was a legendary figure at headquarters—a living myth. And Jordan, detective first grade, owed him his life . . . A hard-hitting, contemporary cop story.*

JORDAN'S WIFE WAS CLEARING THE table. She said, "It might be a good idea to keep your nose out of it."

He said, "Yeah, Sue. How?"

"But you're not sure of anything. Just because you made detective first grade a few months ago you go around suspecting everyone. All that happened was that you saw Bobby Murphy with those two boys."

"I like that—those two boys. One's twenty, the other twenty-one. They each have a minor record as long as my arm. They're both a cinch to finish up the river." Jordan knew them off the book. Ruby Fine and Red Henderson. Grown out of the gangs, the reformatories that seldom reformed, out of the muggings, the assaults, the petty larcenies that would inevitably become felonies. They were suspected of armed robbery, but an obviously frightened storekeeper had not been able to identify them. So he had said.

Sue told him, "Talk to his father. That would be the smart thing."

"I should be able to do better than that. I can see myself walking into Homicide East and saying, 'Inspector Murphy, your son is going to get into trouble hanging around with those two punks.' I owe Inspector Murphy more than a little conversation."

"I'm getting just a little tired of your Inspector Murphy. The last I

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heard, he hadn't been canonized as yet."

"He's a fine man," Jordan said. "You know that."

"So I know it. So it doesn't have to be drummed into me twenty-four hours a day. And if he's such a fine man, why doesn't he take care of his son?"

"He does." Jordan said. "The kid just got out of St. Agnes Prep and he has a nice home. And look at the older brother, Tommy. Out at Notre Dame and doing fine. The Inspector can't be expected to ride herd on this Bobby every minute. He's a busy man."

"He ought to marry again. He can't be too busy for that. And then the boy would have someone to look after him."

"There's an aunt or someone who keeps house. The kid isn't being neglected."

"Then stop worrying about him. It's probably just your imagination."

Jordan said, "All right." He put on his hat and coat. "The kids are across the hall at the Kleins'?" Jimmy was six, Helen was five.

"They'll be back as soon as the last bandit is shot. We'd better get the TV fixed or they won't know you."

He kissed her. "Hold the fort. See you as soon as I can."

He went out of the big apartment development and started the ten minute walk to the precinct house. It was a coincidence that he was currently assigned to a station so convenient to his home. It wouldn't be for long, he knew, but he was thankful for small favors.

It was a neighborhood he had known for most of his life and it had aged without grace—as had most of the city. Once it had possessed a blanketing respectability based on behavior rather than income; but now the lines between nicety and ugliness were sharply drawn, if difficult to define. The streets were safe at night—for thugs. He had grown up here when you could, without risk, send a small boy to the bank with a deposit; now you were afraid your kid would have his ice cream cone stolen. You could live in one of the huge housing projects with a modest graciousness, as he did, but the night air no longer held any quality of comfort or security.

But young Murphy, with his particular background, could be expected to do well even in these less-than-favorable surroundings, and Jordan's concern with him was quite personal if indirect. The possibility that Inspector Thomas J. Murphy's son could get into trouble was almost too difficult to believe.

The Inspector was a living myth, and one to be protected. He was an able cop, an honest cop, and a cop's cop. Slender and of medium height, he was one of the four most decorated men in the history of the Department. Trouble sought him out with the same zeal with which he hunted it, and as a consequence they

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were never far apart. His feats of diligence and bravery were legendary and he accepted glory with quiet, unaffected grace. He was a stern disciplinarian with those under his command and scrupulously fair, paying tribute to intention as well as to performance. He was quite a man. Jordan had worked for him.

He was not likely to forget the occasion, five years ago and in the lower part of the city, when foolishly and alone he had followed three men into a loft building at midnight. His partner had been off and he had been riding single. Jordan had been slugged unmercifully from behind in a black hallway and had awakened to something close to terror. He was tightly bound and he had been mistaken about the intention of the men. He had thought them thieves, but the pervading smell of gasoline in the room where he lay helpless proclaimed them arsonists and their plans for him were evident and simple.

That was when Murphy—then Captain Murphy—had put in one of his miraculous appearances. Merely in the line of duty. Making a street-by-street tour of his section, a trademark of his thoroughness, he had spotted Jordan's unmarked car empty at the curb. A check of each doorway had finally led to the correct one, and by the time he arrived the fire had already been set. He had shot one man and clubbed another, and he had walked into a blazing room and dragged Jordan out by the legs. Both carried burn scars that would always remind them of that occasion.

And you didn't walk up to a man like that and take a chance on breaking his heart. Especially, as Sue had said, when you weren't really sure of anything. So he decided to let it slide for a while.

At the precinct house Joe Brent, his partner, said, "Harry, we're almost unemployed. There hasn't been a diamond ring stolen around here for five days."

In the last two months there had been five stickups of jewelry stores in the precinct, and Jordan and Joe Brent had been assigned to try to stop them. The jobs had followed a rough pattern. They were always committed around the principal shopping centers on the busy evenings; Friday or Saturday, or the first and fifteenth of the month—traditional paydays when many people were on the streets. The technique was relatively simple. Two men entered an uncrowded store, one with a gun. The salesmen—seldom more than two—and the customers were held quietly in check by the armed man while his companion took whatever cash and rings were readily handy. There was no attempt at complete ransacking and the whole transaction took as little as thirty seconds and seldom more than two minutes. The stickup men then faded out into the crowded streets and were instantly lost.

There were plenty of descriptions

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of the thieves. They were tall and short, fat and thin, loud and quiet. Jordan and Brent finally simmered things down to where it was possible to see that all the robberies had been committed by two young men of medium stature who wore khaki trousers, dark woollen jackets and caps—a description which would have accurately fitted more than a hundred thousand young men in the city area. They also wore large sunglasses which presumably they removed the moment they were out on the street. They were very quiet. They did all their talking the moment they entered the store. The man with the gun said, "This is a stickup. Keep your mouths shut." And that was all. None of the victims had as yet been foolish enough to resist.

Jordan and Brent had shown pictures around but there had been no positive identifications. They had staked out various stores on different nights and had had no luck—no luck at all. They had checked pawnshops but so far not a single lead had turned up.

"It might have been one of those things," Jordan said. "They were lucky and they moved out. Planning to pawn the stuff out of the state."

"Tomorrow's Friday, and then we have Saturday. Let's not hoist our feet on the desk just yet. These boys like the weekends."

"I used to, before these slobs turned up. Let's cruise. We'll show a few more pictures."

Again they visited the shops that had been held up, asking more questions and showing additional pictures. The results were still negative. They cautioned a dozen shopkeepers against doing anything foolhardy. The jewels were insured and as for the cash—well, you couldn't buy a new head or a new heart for the two hundred or five hundred that might be in the register.

It was almost midnight and most of the local movies had let out when Jordan said to Brent, who was driving, "Hold the mail, Joe. Just pull over to the curb." He had recognized the three figures walking together on the street.

"What's the trouble?"

"No trouble," Jordan said. "Just a couple of kids I know. Want to talk to them."

"Want me along?"

"What for? Sit here. I won't be a minute."

He got out of the car and walked to a point on the sidewalk where he could intercept the progress of Ruby Fine and Red Henderson and Bobby Murphy and yet be far enough from the car so that Joe wouldn't hear any of the conversation.

The three were close together and they were obviously going to tough him—to walk right through him—until he said, "All right. I want to talk to Murphy." Then they stopped. They were within an inch of being the same height but their physiques were different. All three knew him.

Henderson said, "Who're you,

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Mac?" He was heavy-set, the muscle boy. His face was already eroded by the processes of brutalization.

"You and Fine get out of here," Jordan said. "I want to talk to Murphy."

Fine was slender, with a nice intelligent face almost completely ruined by the frightening cynicism of his eyes. "We're buddies. What does Murph know that we don't know?"

"You two get slobby with me and I'll kick you down the block," Jordan said. "Get moving."

They both grinned at him and he knew a fierce anger. They walked slowly away, turning to grin once more. Murphy started to follow them but Jordan put a big hand on the thin arm and held it hard, his body between Murphy and Joe Brent, in the car. He said, "Easy, Bobby."

Young Murphy said, "What's with all this?" They had met perhaps four times—twice at the Murphy home, when Jordan and his wife had been asked there for some small occasion, not because Jordan was a cop but because both he and Sue were of the old neighborhood. The other meetings, Jordan remembered vaguely, must have occurred when he'd encountered young Murphy and his father on the street.

Jordan said, "You know me," and the boy nodded. He was eighteen, Jordan knew, tall and slim and almost handsome. His eyes and mouth silently expressed some sullen protest. He shifted his feet, put his hands into the pockets of his jacket.

"Why do you hang out with those two? They're not your kind."

The boy shrugged, saying nothing.

"They spell trouble," Jordan went on. "Your father wouldn't like to see you with those two."

"Big man," the boy said. "Top-heavy with medals. Hero type." Then he lifted his eyes and Jordan saw a hint of alarm there. "You been talking to him?"

Jordan shook his head. "But what's the percentage? I don't figure you running with them."

"I met them around. They're all right. You don't have to be a hero before they say hello to you."

Jordan fingered his lip. "Your brother Tommy never buddied with anyone like that."

"The Brain," the boy said. "Highest marks in the history of St. Agnes. All-City quarterback for two years." Then he snorted. "Hell, you have to make a reservation to talk to him!"

Jordan persisted. "These two are grief, kid."

"They go easy. They're not trying to win the game for the world. They don't expect me to be anything but just me. Why don't you get off my back, copper?"

"Does it make any sense to wind up in the pen?" Jordan said. "Or maybe with a bullet in your head? That smart? These clowns are probably just letting you drift with them because they figure if they get in a jam your old man will get the three of you off the hook."

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Young Murphy's face set hard. "That's a lie. We just get along good, is all."

Jordan gave up. Suddenly he felt tired. He said, "Okay, Bobby. Be seeing you."

The boy walked away. Jordan could see Fine and Henderson waiting on the next corner.

He went back to the car and Brent said, "What was all that?"

"Nothing. A kid I know. I hadn't seen him in a long time and wanted to find out how the family was doing. Drive on, Joe."

Back at the precinct house there was nothing waiting for them. Brent cracked, "Mañana, Officer Jordan, we will delve once again into the fascinating files of crime. Keep your badge shiny."

On the way home Jordan stopped for a nightcap. Mulloy's was a neighborhood institution. It had been on the same corner for fifty years and no one had ever been known to get drunk in Mulloy's twice. If it happened once, your capacity was carefully noted and in the future you were limited to exactly what suited you; then it was suggested, in a warm and inoffensive manner, that home was a fine place to be on a night like this. You did not use loud or vulgar accents in Mulloy's and there was no more chance that a man's wife would be embarrassed there than in church. And the beer was still fifteen cents.

Jordan leaned on the pridefully polished bar, and Doc Flanahan, the bartender who had been a fixture since beyond Jordan's memory, said, "Good evening, Harry. And how are Sue and Jimmy and Helen?" He poured Jordan's particular brand of whiskey into a glass and added exactly the right amount of water.

Jordan said, "Fine, Doc, thank you. And the grandchildren?"

"Fresh," Doc said. "Each one fresher than the next. But fine." He went to serve another customer.

Jordan tasted his drink and looked around. He said hello to a couple of people and then grunted quietly. Inspector Murphy was seated with Tom Mulloy at the back table sacred to the elders and the elite, his invariable cup of coffee before him. The Inspector did not drink. It was a moment or two before he saw Jordan, then he smiled and motioned to him. Jordan took his drink and went over.

Tom Mulloy said, "The wife and children, Harry?"

"Fine, Mr. Mulloy," Jordan said. "Hello, Inspector. You're out late."

The ascetic-looking man said, "An occupational complaint, as you well know." He smiled. "Can you sit down yet, Harry?" Jordan's major burn scars were hidden from the world.

He said, "I'll try it." He was certainly getting plenty of the Murphy family tonight. He was always pleased to see the Inspector but he could have done without this meeting.

"I understand you haven't settled

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your problems in the jewelry business," the Inspector said.

"It might have drifted by. It's been almost a week since the last one."

"Well, if it isn't that it will be something else. There's seldom lack of employment in our business. You say Sue and the children are well?"

"Great. How are the boys?" It came out automatically.

"Tommy's doing fine," the Inspector said. "In the top ten of his class." His expression changed. "Bobby's a little different. Just squeezed through school and isn't sure what he wants to do. I imagine the Army will have something to say about that soon. He's—well, in that awkward growing stage, I guess."

The Army, Jordan thought; *if only they would grab that kid now!* He said, "It's a foolish age. When I was eighteen I was always in trouble. I joined on the cops so they wouldn't notice me." He finished his drink and got up. "Nice to see you, Inspector. Time to be getting home. 'Night, Mr. Mulloy."

The walk home was not enjoyable. He thought of that thoroughly good man sitting with his neighborly cup of coffee and of the hurt he could suffer which guns had been unable to inflict. Sue was still awake when he let himself into the apartment. "Bring me any diamonds?"

He sat and told her of his talk with young Murphy. "He's twisted up inside."

"Too much high brass up ahead of him, maybe. All the Murphy talent seems to have been used up before they came to Bobby. A psychologist could probably give you a simple answer. I can offer a bottle of beer."

At eleven o'clock on Saturday night, Jordan and Brent were exactly forty-five seconds too late. Fremont Avenue was crowded, but Brent spotted the commotion near the corner of Clinton. Jordan double-parked the sedan and they got out and pushed their way through the jam and went into the jewelry store. The beat cop had apparently just arrived and was using the store phone to make his call. He recognized them and went on with his conversation. Jordan closed and locked the door to the street and they looked around.

It was a small place and Mr. Swenson had operated it by himself. Now he was more alone than he'd ever been in life. He had been killed by two bullets in the chest and lay near the back of the store at the end of the counter. Three days before they had been in to talk with him and had advised him to offer no resistance in the event of a robbery; but now in his right hand there was a small revolver that had done nothing to preserve his life although it had been fired once. Jordan found the heavy drops of blood near the door that indicated Mr. Swenson had died a good marksman.

Apparently there had been no cus-

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tomers in the store, but they questioned several eager witnesses who clustered near the door. They had heard the shots. They had looked. They had seen two men run from the store. The two men had worn dark woollen jackets, caps, and wide sunglasses. One had carried a gun with which he had successfully threatened the closest observers. There had been a lot of yelling, but the two men had quickly disappeared into the crowd. It was obviously the same pair that had been working the district.

Harris and Martin from Homicide came in and facts and theories were discussed. They walked through the unknowing, unheeding crowds and looked on the sidewalk for blood. They found traces half a block from the store, but that was the end of it.

They had a big fat nothing but they went through the routine. The hospitals were notified that someone might come in with a gunshot wound. The usual alarm went out on the teletype and the radio. Jordan and Brent sat and looked at each other.

Brent was angry. "Smart. Watchdogs of the law. We sit in a nice comfortable car while a couple of punks collect jewelry around the town and then shoot a nice old man. I should have stayed in my father's plumbing business."

Jordan didn't know why it hadn't occurred to him before, and perhaps the thought was just an attempt at relief from the feeling of futility that tormented him. He got up. "Come on. I want to talk to a couple of sterling young men named Fine and Henderson."

"Who are they?"

"You're fairly new up here. Local punks. They were in the pictures we showed around with no takers."

"Those sunglasses are a smart gimmick. You can't tell one movie star from another. Where do we go?"

"Fine is the closest."

At the Fine apartment in the familiar shabby house there was alarm at their early morning visitation. They were informed that Ruby, darling Ruby, was in Bordham Hospital with a broken leg. That very evening he had tripped over a tricycle in the dark hallway and the landlord would be sued, you could bet your life on that.

Jordan was unconvinced until they went to the hospital, took a look at Ruby to make sure it was Ruby, and learned at the desk that he had been admitted at eight o'clock that evening. They went out into the street.

Brent said, "Okay. Now where's this Henderson?"

Jordan shook his head. "He wouldn't move off the corner without Ruby. It was just a hunch. This checks them out." And then he had a horrifying thought that he wouldn't have expressed for his life. If he were to examine this thing thoroughly, he would have to look up Red Henderson, and then Bobby Murphy. He could picture himself ring-

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ing the Murphy doorbell and the Inspector answering it, and himself saying, "Inspector, I want to talk to your son." He shuddered away from the suggestion and knew that in some respects he was a dishonest man.

Or a foolish man. Of course Sue was right. The Murphys were too much on his mind because a man he unashamedly revered had once saved his life. He said, "We'll get nowhere at this hour. Let's call it off."

"I'd like to call the whole thing off," Brent said, "and go on Traffic."

When Jordan got home his wife was asleep. He sat by a window in the dark and the small remainder of the night was not kind to him. A sense of uselessness and outrage was in him although he knew it was illogical. They had nothing to go on except a repeated pattern which would in time lead them to the men they wanted; but time had already been profligate to the extent of a life.

Jordan went over and over every smallest detail connected with the robberies and the murder and could find no fresh facet to examine. It had been light for two hours when Sue came into the living room and found him sitting there.

"Did you just get in?"

"Not long ago. I didn't want to disturb you." He told her what had happened during the night. "Ballistics has the bullets by now. Be able to tell the caliber and probably the make of gun. It'll give us another angle. They'll all add up eventually."

"Get off that job for a few hours. Breakfast is what you need."

He felt no hunger. "Tell you what. I'll go for a ride for an hour or so, then come back and pick up you and the kids for church. The car needs gas anyway. I'll have a bite later."

He went down into the huge court, found his car, and drove it out onto the street. He went into a station for gas and then cruised, his mind busy with the problem that had occupied it now for weeks. He drove through the familiar streets without thinking where he was but knowing every subconscious moment his exact whereabouts. It was barely eight o'clock. There was merely a suggestion of traffic, and noise was observing the Sabbath. The shadows were long, the sun bright where it managed to find its way to the streets through the high barricades of brick.

The moment he saw the figure coming down the stoop of a house a half block away he recognized it and slowed the car. Red Henderson paused at the sidewalk, looked in either direction like the asphalt jungle animal he was, then, apparently satisfied, walked to his left, away from Jordan. He turned the far corner and disappeared. Jordan drove on slowly until he was opposite the house Henderson had just quitted, then stopped the car.

He knew the place. Mrs. Bellner's

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rooming house was a repository for the unsavory facts of life. The crowning tribute to her mental agility was the miracle that the house had never been closed, nor Mrs. Bellner arrested, during twenty years of honest city administration. This was due in part to practical police policy, for if Mrs. Bellner's were to be watched closely—and it frequently was—there could be seen to emerge some strange and sought-after characters who could be apprehended at the convenience of the law. That she herself was engaged in illicit activities there was little doubt but no absolute proof. Her miserable existence was lived beyond legal reproach.

There was nothing unusual in seeing Henderson leave Mrs. Bellner's for when he could afford such a sleazy luxury it was frequently his mailing address. But Jordan acted on impulse. He got out of the car, went up the stoop, and rang the bell. If Henderson were living here, it might be interesting to take a look at his room. There were a limited number of places where you could hide perhaps a hundred diamond rings.

Fat, slovenly, housemother to the misbegotten, Mrs. Bellner herself opened the door. Jordan flashed his tin. "Red Henderson lives here. I want a look at his room."

Mrs. Bellner's smile was something you might see on the bad nights, if you were unlucky, and her voice came up out of the mud. "You know you need a search warrant for a job like that, mister."

Jordan's anger was cold and controlled. "Getting one wouldn't be any trouble at all. And then I'd go through this stinking pesthouse from cellar to attic with a finetooth comb and who knows what I'd find. Or do I get a look at the room?"

Mrs. Bellner's business was reality. "He pays his rent is all I know about him. It's number seven, on the second floor."

"Give me a key," Jordan said, and he took the heavily thonged key she handed him silently. He went up the stairs, had no difficulty finding Number 7, and knowing that Henderson was out on the street and Ruby Fine in the hospital, he opened the door without hesitancy and went into the small dark room.

The figure on the bed started up, then sank back with a small cry. Jordan stared at Bobby Murphy and made the effort to disbelieve without success. The boy was pale, his hair disheveled, his eyes fearful and feverish. His right hand was clamped to his left shoulder and Jordan could see the stain there.

He went to the bed without speaking, drew the boy's hand away without protest, and examined the wound. It was high, just under the clavicle, but the bullet had taken bone out with it as it had passed through. It was not immediately serious, but it certainly needed attention. There had been a clumsy attempt at bandaging.

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Jordan stood there for a moment, knowing pity intimately. The boy stared at him wordlessly and Jordan could see in his eyes all the regret there was in the world.

Jordan said, "Maybe I guessed. But I didn't want to. We'll have to get you out of here."

The boy shook his head. "No."

"It could be covered if the Inspector wanted to do it. You've knocked yourself out and you've knocked him out. Things can't be the same no matter what happens."

The boy said, "No!" and started to cry. He talked, his face half buried in the dirty pillow, and Jordan listened, shocked. It was a tale of too much good example unconsciously given to a person of lesser abilities. There had been no sermons, no strident precepts. There had been no expressed dissatisfaction, no rebukes. There had been merely the bright and shining and always-present examples. You tried. You tried and you failed, and the taste of failure was so bitter you stopped trying. You sulked and you sought a less difficult avenue to something approaching esteem. You had to have the kicks, even of an unapproved variety. You had to have even this pitiful sense of belonging. You were no student and you were no athlete and your courage had not been tried. The heights on which your heroes lived were unattainable. You had to be an entity on some other level.

"It was the first time," the boy sobbed. "Some of the other times I watched. They'd never shot anyone. They told me the gun was a phony. Then Ruby hurt his leg, so I went in with Red and the man shot me."

"All right," Jordan said, trying somehow to accept what simply could not have happened. "We'll get you out of here. We'll work out something, kid."

Bring him to his home, he thought, *and let the Inspector take care of this from here on. I can't think of anything else.*

He walked away from the bed for a moment, afraid of what he might say, knowing that it would be useless and meaningless. Across the room was a shabby chest of drawers and he walked to it, remembering his original purpose. He opened a drawer and flipped aside some linen, and then he heard the full cry from the bed over near the door. He turned in time to see it happen.

Red Henderson was in the open door, a gun in his hand. Young Murphy had somehow come off the bed. He yelled, "No, Red! No!" and moved toward Henderson.

Henderson said, "A cop! You lousy punk!" and shot young Murphy once in the chest. He turned and Jordan had his gun out, and as Henderson's shot barely missed him, Jordan shot him once in the chest and once in the throat. Henderson fell sprawling.

Jordan lowered the gun and walked to the bed. Young Murphy

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lay there, the young and lifeless body still, the young misunderstanding and misunderstood life all spent. There was no sullenness in the eyes and mouth now. There was nothing.

But there was the sound of feet pounding on the stairs and there was the awakening sense of reality and the calculatedness returning to a bitterly logical mind. Jordan slammed the door shut. He looked around the room, found the dark jacket, and put it on the unresisting form of young Murphy. He found the shoes and laced them in place on each foot, and then he ripped loose the old bandage and stuffed it in his pocket. Then he opened the door.

He did not listen to Mrs. Bellner's gurgled obscenities. He pulled her into the room and pointed to the boy on the bed. He said, "He came in here with me. Remember?"

Mrs. Bellner stared at him for only a moment. No one had ever accused her of being stupid. She said, "Yeah. I remember."

"That's all you need to know," Jordan told her. He had never known a man could feel so old. Or so tired. He hoped they wouldn't bother to look around the walls and find the slug Henderson had missed him with. He didn't think they'd bother.

"That's the way it was, Inspector," Jordan said. "I guess you know how I feel. He was walking along and I gave him a ride and then I saw Henderson come out of Bellner's place. I thought I'd take a look and Bobby asked if he could come along. With Henderson out and Fine in the hospital I figured it would be all right, that it would give the kid a boot. I can't forgive myself for what happened. He just got in the way and Henderson didn't care."

"Harry," the Inspector said. He had aged ten years in ten hours. "Ease it off, man. I know how you feel. It was a mistake. A bad mistake. But I know how you feel. You'll forget it after a while. Maybe I will too."

Jordan knew that the man would try to forget what he would always believe had happened. The Inspector would try, too, to recreate the relationship that had existed between himself and Jordan. He would try.

And Jordan thought of his wife, and of the fact that he would never be able to explain to her the departmental reprimand, the demotion.

The Inspector said quietly, "And to think I was upset because the boy hadn't slept in his bed last night. A little thing like that."

"He said something about being at a party in Jersey," Jordan said. "I wouldn't know about that."

"We'll never know," the Inspector said. He was holding on tight, Jordan could see—the way a good man held on. No anger had been allowed to show. "We'll never know."

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **F. L. WALLACE**

TITLE: ***Driving Lesson***

TYPE: Suspense Story

LOCALE: On a main highway

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *It began with a sordid incident in a roadside restaurant. It ended in a murderous duel fought with modern weapons. A hard, tough story, full of heart and integrity, and packing a terrific wallop . . .*

ONCE INSIDE THE ROADSIDE RESTAURANT, Walt Herrick felt as he sometimes did the fraction of a second before a tire blew. There was no reason for the thought to occur except, possibly, he'd been driving too long. He needed coffee.

He sat down at the counter and poured a glass of water. The jukebox scratched out the last notes of a worn tune, then died. A refrigerator whirred rhythmically somewhere in the kitchen that was partly visible through the narrow slot directly behind the counter. A scuffle of suppressed hilarity echoed from the corner booth opposite the kitchen.

The waitress was involved in it, of course, which was why she paid no attention to him. She leaned far over the table, teasing the occupants, apparently with some success. The dark outline of an arm was wrapped amorously around her. Still leaning over, she twisted toward Herrick. Her face was a smear of white against the shadows of the booth.

"Be with you in a minute," she said. Her voice cracked.

"Cup of black now. Pork tenderloin sandwich when you get around to it." Herrick was annoyed, but more than that, he was puzzled. She didn't seem amorously inclined.

The arm let go, stroked her shoulder, and finally whacked her with

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considerably more force than seemed necessary for a caress. The waitress straightened up and hurried to the counter, adjusting her uniform. She stumbled past Herrick to the three silexes on the hotplate by the wall. She brought back a heavy mug and poured out steaming coffee. Her arm pressed accidentally against the silex and she stifled an exclamation.

As she set the mug in front of him he saw her face clearly. There was no trace of excitement. She was bewildered, but most of all she was afraid. She was young, Herrick guessed, but how young he couldn't say. Her youth didn't have a chance to show.

"Tenderloin san," she called, retreating to the wall at the end of the counter, far away from the booth.

"Loin san." The acknowledging grunt came from the kitchen. A dirty white chef's hat rose up, more crumpled than peaked. The face below it was stretched as tight as the cap was wrinkled. The light was bright in the kitchen, though nowhere else, and Herrick could distinguish a network of red veins on shining cheeks. If the rest of him matched his shoulders, and Herrick couldn't tell from this angle, the cook was a big man.

Opening the refrigerator, the cook hauled out a slab of meat. Brandishing the knife, he made a slicing motion below eye level. Then he exchanged the knife for a cleaver, laid the meat on a block, and smashed it with the flat of the blade. His actions were deliberate and powerful. He seemed to derive personal satisfaction from cutting and flattening.

"Three beers, Connie. Don't let them warm up on the way here."

She jumped at the voice from the booth. She plunged her arm in the cooler, drew out three bottles, wiped them, and set them on the counter. In her haste to invert glasses over the necks, one glass slipped from her grasp and shattered on the floor. Ignoring the mishap, she quickly put another glass on the bottle and carried them to the booth.

It was no way to behave with unruly customers. Walt Herrick wanted to tell her that but she slipped past before he could get a word out. She placed the beer on the edge of the table and tried to leave. She wasn't fast enough. Hands seized her arms as others swiftly swept the bottles out of the way. She was jerked half into the booth, the corner of the table jamming into her. Herrick could actually hear the jar. She didn't cry out as arms twined around her. She was getting worked over, good.

The impulse to get up and help her was slight, and Herrick resisted it. He didn't care to have his face stepped on, or worse. The occupants of the booth were quite sure of themselves, and if they were that sure, he wasn't. Herrick wasn't built for fighting and he was well aware of it.

He looked at the cook, who got up slowly, glancing out of the window at the front. One of the infre-

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quent cars that flashed by had driven in and was honking impatiently.

Cleaver in hand, the cook went to the slot that faced the booth. He reached outside and snapped on a small bulb that gave him a better view of the girl's legs. He examined her lengthily. "Look, Connie," he said at last. "How many times do I have to tell you? No fooling around when there are customers."

Herrick was glad he hadn't got up, or expected the cook to pitch in and help him.

The cook leaned against the slot, hacking the edge with the cleaver for emphasis. "I mean it," he growled. "None of this rough stuff when we've got customers. Do you hear?"

Somebody heard. Hands released her. The waitress started to back away, only to be caught and dragged back. The cook banged ominously with the cleaver and this time she got completely free. She ran behind the counter, breathing as if she'd been running for hours.

The cook snapped out the light on the side and withdrew his head. He came out of a door that opened toward the booth from the kitchen cubicle and, muttering to himself, headed toward the front of the restaurant. The car honked again, then drove away before the cook reached the door.

Still muttering and snorting, he came back. Physically he wasn't as impressive as Herrick had pictured. He was barrel-shaped, outweighing Herrick by a hundred pounds, but he wasn't much taller—say, five nine. The kitchen floor, Herrick figured, must be higher than that of the restaurant.

The girl was washing dishes when Herrick turned his attention to her. She rattled them noisily, feverishly. She kept putting the same ones in water, wiping them with a cloth, taking them out, and putting them in again. She was quite young, he saw, and very inexperienced. Her first job, most likely, and she didn't know how to handle it.

A smart waitress wouldn't have let the customers in the booth get that far with her. She would have kidded them along, or refused to serve them. But this girl didn't know that. She certainly wasn't helping herself by running to them as soon as they called. They obviously enjoyed bulldozing and manhandling her.

"How did you get in this situation?" said Herrick over the counter.

She looked up. "More coffee?"

One of the men got up from the booth and swayed toward the counter. She retreated to the hotplate in the corner and the man changed his destination, going to the jukebox up front. There he peered at the selections and began stuffing coins in, remaining in rapt attention as the music started.

"You aren't going to get out of this by pretending it doesn't exist," Herrick said as she came back with the refill. There was a bruise on her

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arm and a button of her uniform dangled by a thread. Her eyes were dull, panic-stricken. He doubted that she saw him.

"They can't hear you over the music," he said when she failed to answer. "Why don't you walk out of here? Nobody needs a job that bad."

She heard the last part. "The bus doesn't come by till one," she said shakily, backing away to the corner.

Herrick heard but ignored the footsteps approaching from the juke-box. He felt the breath against his head before the other spoke.

"What do you know, the old man's got a little life in him. You think she's cool too. Think you can do anything with her?"

The voice was too deep to be entirely real. Herrick turned around slowly, keeping his fingers curled in the handle of the mug. A man towered over him. Rather, it was a youth. Tall, thin, and angular, he'd spent more time in combing elaborate waves in his hair than in washing his face. His skin was bad.

Herrick placed him. Young, perhaps younger than the girl, he liked to think he was fully grown up. He wasn't. But there was a long scar on the back of the hand dangling near Herrick that the youth was obviously proud of. And if he'd spent much time practicing the surly leer on his face the effort was wasted. His normal expression was surly enough.

"What's the matter, dad? Can't you think of anything to say?"

Herrick estimated where a foot would do the most good. His stomach tightened. If he failed to connect with the first swing, and after that if he didn't get in the car before the others reached him, he'd be eating knives. If this was the night they left their arsenal at home a broken bottle would do as well.

"She's a kid," he said mildly. "I don't play with kids."

"Good for you, dad. Some of us kids know things you never learned."

"I doubt it," said Herrick. "I doubt it very much."

The youth scowled, tightening his fingers on the back of the stool. "Past your bedtime, old man. Why don't you plan on getting to sleep early tonight?" He glanced uncertainly at the mug of hot coffee Herrick held. He didn't like the compact readiness of Herrick's body, and his friends weren't near enough to suit him. In the absence of a good remark he sneered, flicked his hand at Herrick, and slowly walked away.

Conversation stopped dead at the booth when he got there. Faces peered at the counter over the back and around the sides. Herrick was being checked over, and the appraisal wasn't friendly. A brief argument followed and the conclusion was that they weren't going to bother him yet. They wanted the girl.

He waited for the sandwich he no longer wanted. When the cook placed it in the slot the youths saw

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it and clamored immediately for beer. The waitress wiped her hands and obediently served them first. They pawed her again, but with somewhat less force. The tall youth grinned around the corner of the booth at Herrick, inviting him to come over and stop them. Herrick kept sipping his coffee.

The girl came back, served him, then immediately crouched in the corner. She was either ashamed or terrified. It didn't matter which—the effect was the same. She was paralyzed, had no thought of resistance.

He ate slowly, wishing she would talk.

As he sat there, the youths paraded by at intervals, ostensibly to replenish the jukebox. Number One he had seen. Number Two was nearly as tall, but considerably heavier. His eyes were surprisingly large and he had long silky lashes. The rest of his face consisted of a built-in pout which, if it had been voluntary, would have done credit to an actress. It was an actress Herrick thought of. Number Two swaggered, but he wasn't impressively masculine.

Number Three was the comparative midget of the trio—just about six feet. He was well-built however, and if he lacked the size he made up for it in coordination. He rippled when he walked and if he wasn't a star halfback he should have been.

He was also quite nice-looking, a blond with brown eyes, deep brown eyes that almost concealed his arrogance. Herrick studied Number Three as he sauntered by, openly scrutinizing Herrick. The other two would attack thoughtlessly, but Number Three would have a well-reasoned plan for anything he did. Herrick watched Number Three glance at the girl and knew exactly what his reasons were.

Finally the trio sat down, convinced that Herrick wasn't going to interfere. Opportunely the waitress came near him.

"Connie," Herrick said conversationally. "Constance."

She gazed at him, numb, fearful. "Connie, who are these boys?"

She waited before answering. The cook fancied the sound of the cleaver and had taken the loin out and was alternately cutting meat and smashing the slices.

"I don't know their names," she said dully.

That much was a triumph; she said something. "You've seen them before?"

"Three or four times. Mostly this last week."

"Have they always behaved this way?"

"No, but it's never easy when they're around."

"I'm convinced of it. Were they ever as bad as this before?"

"No." Her eyes asked him to believe it. "Nothing like this. Nobody was ever as rough."

"They'll get rougher unless you put a stop to it. What's the matter with the cook? He swings a nasty cleaver."

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The record stopped and before the next one started the cook heard them. He came to the slot and looked out. "Connie, how many times have I got to tell you? Stack the dishes away as well as wash them. Fill the sugar bowls too."

He stood there until the waitress complied. Then he went back to the block, cutting and smashing, wiping flecks of meat from his hands.

Herrick chewed the sandwich. The bus to town came at one. It was now eleven-six. The sandwich couldn't last that long and when he left he gave them ten minutes, not more than fifteen. His arrival had quieted them temporarily, and the cleaver had helped, but the effect was now wearing off.

He waited until the girl came near and rattled his cup. "What about the cook?" he asked as she filled it.

She glanced behind her nervously. "He's been after me too. This afternoon I had to run out on the road. I told him I'd leave if he didn't stop."

An experienced waitress would have done just that, leave, but this girl was too young to know—and she still hadn't learned. The youths were noisy again, shouting for more beer. She whirled away and took it to them. The well-muscled youth sat on the outside where he had a better view of what was going on. The better view included Herrick.

Herrick had enough coffee but he forced himself to drink more, watching the byplay at the booth. It was merely a repetition of what had gone before, with variations. The tall youth pulled her down to the seat and whispered to her. She tried to get away but her efforts were ineffective. A hand reached over the tall youth and slid down the back of her dress. She struggled wildly and succeeded in freeing herself. There was a ripping sound as she broke away and Number Two—the one with the perpetual pout—held up two-thirds of a brassière. He waved it around, swinging it. There was appreciative laughter by the others.

Herrick swung off the seat and around the counter in time to have the waitress run into him as she sought the protection of the counter. "Where's the rest room?" he said loudly, holding her up. She was trembling, jerking with terror.

"Back," she gasped.

He turned his shoulder to the booth. "Is there a phone?" he said, in a lower voice.

Her face was dead-white. "In the cook's house, in back," she said. "He won't give you the keys."

But he'd give the keys to the girl, thought Herrick, providing he went with her. The cook was comprehensible. Not pleasant, but understandable. Herrick let go of her and she slid behind the counter. There was a long thin stain on her back, from the fingernails of the youth who had torn out her brassière.

Herrick went back to the rest room. It stank.

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When he came back the two taller youths were dancing together with exaggerated motions. The tattered brassière was draped on the pouter and the thin one was nuzzling it with pretended ecstasy. They danced near the counter, swirling nearer as Herrick sat down. The blond youth at the booth fingered a bottle.

Herrick gulped down the coffee and stood up, taking out his wallet. The dancers moved away as Herrick went to the cash register. There was no time left at all. He handed a twenty to the waitress. She looked at it blankly.

"Can't you change it?" he said. "I think I've got something smaller."

He thumbed slowly through the money. "Constance, do as I say. Go to the back, to the men's room, as soon as you give me the change. Don't let anyone stop you, and lock the door behind you. Do you understand?"

It didn't seem to get through to her. He gave her a five.

"Now. Once you're inside, climb out the window. I've cut the screen so you won't have any trouble. Go around the east, where the cook can't see you pass the window. When I start the car, jump in. The door will be open. Got it?"

He wasn't sure she had, but he couldn't repeat the instructions. She gave him the change. There was a dollar extra but he wasn't going to call her attention to it and confuse her. "Get moving," he said.

He turned his back and looked for the cigarette machine. He knew where it was but he pretended to look. The dancers grabbed at the girl as she went by but she got past. Herrick flicked the coins in the machine so that they rolled on through. He tried that twice but eventually they stayed in. He pulled the lever. By now she was in the rest room.

He lighted a cigarette slowly, gauging the patience of the youths. When he was down to a small butt, he went out. His car, a big new one, was near the pumps, unfortunately on the wrong side. Another car was parked in the shadow of the restaurant and there was a hot-rod on the far side of the drive.

The highway was deserted. For once he would have welcomed traffic. He got in his own car and opened the door opposite. He started the motor, waiting. She didn't come.

He pulled forward, intending to turn around. He saw her in the rear-view mirror, snapped into reverse, cut swiftly around the air and water post, and stopped. She got in.

He drove out on the road, the lights of the restaurant fading behind. "What took you so long?"

"I had to get my coat."

"Your coat?"

"Of course. They tore off my brassière. I couldn't go out like this, could I?"

"I think in this instance you could," he said grimly. "If you work in places like this you'd better begin to learn fast."

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She shivered, wrapping her coat around her. She looked as if she were ready to cry, just about ready if he said another word. He turned on the heater and punched the radio to classical music, low and soothing. He lit a cigarette for her, giving her the pack he'd bought in the restaurant. A good stiff drink would have been the thing for her, but he never carried it in the car.

He looked her over. She'd taken more of a beating than he had realized. There were bruises on her legs and her face was marked and discolored. One ear was swollen and there was a chip out of a tooth. A trickle of dried blood was on the unsteady hand that held the cigarette. It was nothing serious though, now that it was past.

She stabbed the cigarette at the ash tray, finally stuffing it in on the second attempt. "I hope they don't find out I've gone. Not until we get to town at least."

"Hate to disappoint you, but they already know. They didn't wait long. They went looking for you when you didn't come back."

"You think so?" She twisted around to look through the rear window. Her voice rose apprehensively. "You're right. There's a car behind us."

"Don't be upset. It may not be theirs."

"It is though. It has their funny lights."

"You can't tell at this distance."

"I can. I'd recognize their car anywhere." She slid closer to him, more frightened than she had been in the restaurant. "There's a crossroad at the bottom of the hill. Turn off on it. They won't know where we've gone."

The car purred smoothly, responding delicately to his touch. "Do you know where the road leads?"

"No. It doesn't matter. They won't know we turned off on it."

"We can't get away with it. They're too close. Besides, it does matter if you think about it. I've driven the road we're on once or twice before and know what to expect. On a strange road I'd be at a disadvantage. These kids would know every turn."

He put his hand on the back of her neck and shook her comfortingly. "This is my business. Leave it to me. There's no need to be worried."

She looked back. "At least drive faster. Please!"

"This is fast enough."

"You know what they'll do if they get me."

"They won't get you."

"What can you do? There are three of them, all bigger than you."

"But they have only one car, and mine is heavier than theirs."

"You don't seem to understand," she said despairingly. "They live in cars. They take them apart and put them together. That's all they think of. They practice running cars off the road. I've heard them talk."

He didn't comment. The car behind was coming up fast, very fast. As a concession he edged the speed-

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ometer upward. He had never doubted it was the trio and the spotlight that swept the road beside them and then bored through his rear window removed any doubt. He adjusted the mirror so the glare didn't strike his eyes.

The girl doubled over, covering her face with her hands. "I wish I'd stayed," she said dully. "Peterson would have stopped them."

"If Peterson's the cook, don't be a fool," he said. "Whatever he may have originally intended, he'd have been afraid to wave his finger outside the kitchen once they started. He couldn't get to the phone, wouldn't even have attempted it."

"They'll kill me," she began to whimper. "They'll kill you too."

"We're still alive," he said.

He reached the bottom and started up the next hill when the other car nudged his from the rear. He was doing sixty-five and it was a hard nudge. He braked down and skittered from side to side in the lane. The girl was crying, not loudly.

Again the other car rammed him, with more force. He braked to forty, switched pedals, and shot ahead. The hot-rod lagged for an instant, then swept up beside him. It had nice pick-up. The heavier car probably had a higher top speed even though the smaller car was hopped up, but Herrick knew he couldn't match accelerations on the curves.

The hot-rod edged into him, forcing him off the pavement. He bounced onto the shoulder. It was springy, uneven. He didn't care for the feel of it. Remembering the road ahead, he knew he had to last for several miles. He swerved back toward the pavement, scraping fenders.

Instinctively the other car pulled away. They had expected him to crash into the fence, or stop, so that they could swarm on him. He'd hate to have them get to him. Number One of the trio, the tall youth with the bad skin, was sitting in front, on Herrick's side. His face was distorted with glee. The athlete was in back, also on the near side. The chase had infected him too, although he tried not to show it.

When the other car pulled away, Herrick squeezed back on the road. On the road and ahead. He lead-footed it for a while, pushing eighty in a matter of seconds. Speed, but not only speed. There was a chance they might become discouraged. They didn't.

They had tinkered more than a few rpm's into the engine and they hadn't skimped torque. Their car took the grade as well as the larger one, laying back only because of the curve ahead. Herrick took the curve on the far lane, which was not dangerous since there were no lights visible from an oncoming car.

The road had been altered somewhat since the last time he'd driven it. He had to cut sharply to keep traction and that took him back to the lane he'd been in. The youths moved up beside him, pinching him

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against the guardrail that flashed by. As he remembered it, there wasn't much on the other side of the rail, a slope several hundred feet down to a stream invisible in the darkness.

Herrick didn't like the situation. The other driver was fair. Just fair. He depended too much on reflexes, which were good enough, but he was entirely lacking in judgment. That was dangerous for both of them.

The hot-rod forced him steadily against the guardrail. His speed had dropped—sixty-five, sixty now. He caught a brief glimpse of the youths speeding beside him. He didn't have much time to think about it, but he'd seen similar faces in a museum. The Neanderthal exhibit. The blond athletic boy rolled down the window and spat violently. Saliva splattered Herrick's window. He could no longer see through it clearly.

Herrick glanced at the guardrail. It was closer, not more than a few feet from his fenders. That was too close. In passing he noted the girl's face. It was blank, beyond fear. Estimating the distance, he gained a few feet, hooking bumpers with the car. He touched the wheel lightly and the rear end skewed, the fender scraping the guardrail.

Touch was all it did, but the loud clear twang was unmistakable. The locked bumper tugged at the hot-rod and the driver depended on his reactions instead of his head. He pulled away.

Herrick dug in his brakes, showering dust and gravel that for an instant obscured the road. From outside the dust it looked like a crackup, but it wasn't. Herrick swung back to the pavement, lightfooted skillfully, and when he moved up it was the other car that was pinned against the rail.

The driver of the hot-rod fought the wheel. He was unaccustomed to the wrong side of a squeeze. That was his cue to slow down, but he failed to pay attention. He tried to batter his way out but the heavier car wouldn't be moved. Next he tried all the speed he had but Herrick stayed with him, anticipating every spurt, each desperate lunge.

The blond youth moved toward Herrick's side. He rolled down the window but this time he didn't spit. He reached for the door handle. Herrick accelerated out of reach, losing some position.

"Lock the door," Herrick called.

She was still in a trance and didn't hear him. Again the hot-rod drew closer. The athletic youth swung a bottle at Herrick's window. The airstream deflected his aim and the bottle smashed against his own center post. He flung it down at Herrick's tires and reached for another. He seemed to have quite a supply.

His intent was obviously to break Herrick's window and then hurl another bottle in at him. His chances of connecting were scant but Herrick was through giving them chances. He'd held back long enough.

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He hadn't forced them to follow him, although now that he looked back on it, he had made more noise driving away from the restaurant than had been strictly necessary. Also, he had allowed them to corner him much too easily. Still, they knew that if they slowed or stopped he would have to drive on. Physically he was no match for the three of them, or even one. They knew it, but it didn't seem to make any difference to them. He was tired of their murderous antics.

Herrick drifted away slightly, letting them think speed would get them out. Their speedometer probably registered ninety but actually they weren't going that fast. Suddenly he slanted in on them again, and the instant before contact he cut his wheels sharply. His rear end skidded into the other car, flipping it into the rail, through it, and beyond. Their speed aided him.

He took his foot off the accelerator and coasted around the curve. When he reached a point where he could look back, there wasn't much to see—just two lights rolling over and over. As he watched, one of the lights went out. The other continued on an erratic downward path, gleaming fitfully as it flickered on and off. He didn't see it reach the bottom.

He drove into town and after a short conversation with the girl, put her on a bus that took her home, some ten miles away. After that he went to the police station.

It was a small town, and the station certainly wasn't overcrowded at this hour. The officer on duty put down the sports section as Herrick came up.

"Report on an auto accident."

"Traffic division's on the other side."

"Maybe you can help me. I saw a car go through a guardrail and roll down the hill."

The officer was alert. "Where? About ten miles east?"

"About that. Is it a bad spot?"

"Is it? That spot keeps the undertakers in business." He grimaced, reaching for a phone. He barked into it, questioning Herrick in more detail as to the exact location of the accident. He hung up finally, his face drawn. "A unit's going out. They'll find it. All they have to do is look for a hole in the rail." He shook his head. "They won't do much good. That's a steep hill."

"It seemed to be."

The officer glared at him disgustedly. "You saw it. Why didn't you stop and help? At least, try to help."

"I couldn't get down. I thought it was a job for experts."

"Everything is. But experts are no good when they get there too late." He scratched his head wearily. "All right. Tell me what happened."

"I can't actually say I saw it. These kids had passed me earlier, driving fast and erratically."

"How do you know they were kids?"

"The car was a hot-rod. They were acting up."

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"That doesn't always mean they were kids."

"I suppose not. But I recognized them from a restaurant I stopped at. They were drinking beer when I went in for coffee."

"Beer? The restaurant served them beer?" The officer grunted. "Remember the name of the place?"

Herrick felt for the matches he'd got with the cigarettes. "Here. The White Door Café."

The cop clenched the matches, staring at the name. "I've been there, out in the country. So it's a job for the Sheriff, damn it. Peterson is going to get his license jerked but fast if he makes one slip we can hang on him." The officer had a few more lines on his face. "It hits me when kids get it like that."

"Naturally," said Herrick.

The officer took out a pad. "Better plan on staying over till tomorrow. We'll need you for the investigation."

"Is it important? I have business coming up this weekend. I want to be fresh for it."

Before the officer could reply Herrick took out his driver's license and looked at the sports section on the desk. The item he wanted wasn't on the first page but it had to be somewhere. He turned the paper and there it was. He laid the license by the picture.

The cop stared at it. "Hell," he said. "I should have known who you were."

"I don't look the same in street clothes."

"You do. I wasn't thinking or I'd have recognized you at once." He lit a cigarette, then hastily remembering his manners, offered one. "Say, it was sure too bad about Indianapolis. You had it locked up until the motor went out."

"Bearings fouled me up. You can't win them all."

"I guess not, but you sure try." The officer put the pad in the desk. "We can forget about needing you. I'll put down that an unidentified passing motorist notified me of the accident. It won't help them any, and you've got a lot of driving to do." He hesitated, flushing with embarrassment. "There is another thing, though."

"There usually is, but that's all right. I can be cooperative too."

"It sounds funny but, well, I teach a driving course at the high school. It's one of those things I do because I think I ought to. You know how it is."

"I know," said Herrick.

"Well, anyway, you haven't got time now. I realize that. But sometime, maybe, when you're passing through again . . ." His voice trailed off and the officer stabbed out the cigarette he'd just lighted.

"That's reasonable," said Herrick. "Next time I come this way I'll be glad to stop. I'll give the kids a driving lesson."

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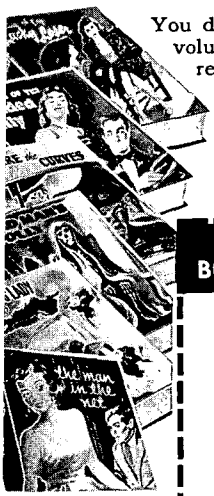

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